

ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XXXIV.

Published Every Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers, 98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., February 9, 1887.

Ten Cents a Copy. \$5.00 a Year.

No. 433



A STRANGELY COLD SMILE CREPT INTO THE HANDSOME FACE OF LEO LAUGHLIN AS HE GRASPED HIS PARTNER BY THE ARM AND LED HIM TO WHERE THE TWO SACKS OF POISON STILL LAY.

Spread Eagle Sam's Dandy Pard.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR., AUTHOR OF "OLD '49," "MONTE JIM," "NOR' WEST NICK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DUSKY GUARDIAN.

"STEADY, old fellow—steady! You'll never be fit for a philosopher to ride unless you learn to curb your appetites a little more judiciously."

The horse, a rich, deep buckskin, darkly mottled over the hips, gave a slight whimper at the sound of that gay, bantering voice, pricking back its ears for a moment, then stretching out its slender neck with an impatient tug at the bit shaking its head as though protesting against this unwonted restraint.

The rider laughed his tones low and musical.

The rider laughed, his tones low and musical, yet with something in them that was far akin from mirth. With hardly a seeming effort, that small gloved hand drew the tossing head back and down until the foam-fringed jaw fairly touched the sweat-darkened counter.

"Misery loves company, Mott," with a repeti-

tion of that peculiar laugh. "True, you're only a horse; a pretty good plug, after a homely, every-day fashion; but never likely to set the river afire. Only a horse; willing, faithful, without a blemish or a fault—save that you call Laughing Leo your master! And right there you make a mighty mistake, Mott—a monstrous mistake, old fellow!"

Mott turned his head as far as the taut reins would permit, a low whimper shaking his thin,

distended nostrils.

Leo Laughlin leaned forward and patted his arched neck, slackening the reins as he did so.

"That puzzles your matter-of-fact brain, eh? You scent the cool water. You know that the spring is only a few rods away. Your throat is hot and half-filled with dust. You know that a few big strides would carry you to the trough where you could bury your nose to the eyes in water cool and sparkling as ever came to light through the medium of the old oaken bucket. Yet you are held back. You are snubbedthat's the word, Mott. Snubbed! Hadn't I ought to know it?"

An echo of bitterness that was almost fierce ran through the short laugh that followed the words. Deep wrinkles marked the white brow, and a reddish light glowed and sparkled in those

bright blue eyes.

Could one have caught the words without seeing the author, one would have decided that the speaker was airing his own grievance. And yet, Leo Laughlin was hardly a student of human nature one would deliberately pick out as a fit subject for snubbing.

A man rarely shows off to better advantage than when in the saddle; and Leo Laughlin was a natural born equestrian, which is very far removed from the prim, precise model of the rid-

ing-schools.

He was a comparatively youthful man, graceful in figure, with long, rounded limbs that bespoke more than an ordinary share of muscular strength and activity. In face he was handsome, his complexion so pure, his skin so finegrained, his color so delicate and perfectly blended as to convey a disagreeable impression of effeninacy; but only at the first glance.

A second look was sufficient to show the real manhood underlying this foppish exterior. A third was warning enough for any wise man.

A neat mustache shaded, without entirely concealing, the moist red lips, now slightly parted in a half-smile, half-sneer, affording a glimpse of white, even teeth. His eyes were blue, large and lustrous. His nose long and straight, with thin nostrils. His chin full without fatness, cleft in the middle with an oblong dimple that carries with it a warning to knowing eyes.

Over his nut-brown hair, short and curling in tiny rings, soft and glossy as ever maiden wore, rested a broad-brimmed hat of pearl gray felt, its band of leather fastened with a bright golden

buckle in true cowboy style.

Apart from this badge of his new profession, Laughing Leo's garb was one better fitted for the city than the plain, of costly material without being in the least "flashy" or "loud." A valuable diamond flashed in the golden ring that secured his scarf. A slender chain of fine links crossed his vest. On his slender, neatly shaped feet were riding-boots of patent leather, and kid gloves covered his hands.

A rather strong contrast was afforded by the belt of silk webbing which encircled his middle, supporting a pearl-handled knife and a brace of revolvers, cartridges for which filled woven loops all around the belt. In a leather scabbard, attached to the saddle, hung a magazine rifle,

balanced by a neatly coiled lasso.

"Ay! snubbing with a big S, o'd fellow!" the rider added with a half-defiant toss of his head as he permitted his steed to move on again. "It's been my staple food since the first week I struck this range, and I'm actually growing fat on it! No thanks to them, though!" with sudden bitterness, a frown corrugating his brows. hips. "A friend, or a fool. One man has no "They meant it to sicken, if not to kill. They | license to go for my hair, with a warning that counted on its freezing me out, hide, hoof and horns. They look on us as interlopers, old fellow, and they want our room much more than they do our company. Not very flattering, is

Mott uttered a low whimper as the gloved hand smoothed his neck, but the way in which he stretched out his long neck and champed at the bit, snuffing the grateful scent of cool water in advance, showed plain enough where his thoughts were. And, unreasonable though it was, this seemed to irritate his master. His red lips curled half-savagely as his armed heel pricked the willing steed, sending him forward like an arrow fresh loosed from the string, only to draw him up short as the watering-

place was reached.

"Patience, old fellow," with a short, hard laugh, steadying the angrily tossing head with an iron grip. "Kicking against the first prick? That's more foolish than your master! I've taken dose after dose with all the grace and meekness of an angel in modern dress. It was bitter, but I smiled blandly as I bowed my thanks. Why? Well-right or wrong I struck out a new trail, and unless Satan forbids, I'll follow it out to the end, as I began.

'It comes hard—mighty hard, though! Just 'rider came dashing up.

as you find it hard to be denied your fill of the cool water that sparkles beneath your thirsty muzzle, old fellow," still restraining the chafing animal. "Just to let you sympathize with your master, Mott!

"You see what seems perfect bliss almost within reach of your dust-parched muzzle. You feel that life has nothing more delicious to offer. You could curse me with hearty good will for holding you back from the feast, had you the power of mortal tongue. Yet I-bah!" and Leo Laughlin suddenly loosened the reins, permitting his steed to dip its velvety muzzle deep in the rude drinking-trough before it.

"I ask your pardon, good fellow," laughing softly as he bent over in the saddle and gently patted the arched neck. "Promise that you'll never whisper my folly, even to your closest friend, and I'll never try to teach you boy-

cotting at second hand again!"

There was a deep flush upon his smoothamends, Laughing Leo permitted his horse to usual throbbings. drink unrestrained, more freely perhaps than he would otherwise have done, in his heated

And there was a faint trace of sheepishness in the quick glance which he cast around him, like one who fears being observed by others.

It was a pleasant scene enough, even at that season of the year when the grass of the cattle range is converted to sun-cured hay, looking dead and worthless.

On all hands save one, the ground stretched away in gently undulating swells, broken here and there by an occasional clump of bushes, a few trees, or one of those curious bowlders, huge and massive, which whisper of the faraway ice age.

A point of rocks, covered over in part by creepers and stunted shrubbery, extended from the broken range. From this point came a spring of water, known far and wide to man

and beast.

The water first gushed forth from its hidingplace several yards above the level of the plain, and the hand of man had fashioned it for the greater convenience of those who thirsted, both

two and four-footed.

A basin had been hewn out of stone, covered over with a heavy slab, leaving simply a spout from which to drink, or to catch the water in a cup, thus securing it from pollution by birds or beasts. From this spout the waste water fell into a hollow trough, leading down the slope | skin. until the stream fell with a musical murmur into a great log bollowed out and strongly supported by rocks on each side to prevent its being tipped over. A notch cut in the lower end of this trough permitted the superfluous water to flow over and spread out into a miniature pond a few vards below.

But Leo paid no attention to these details. The spring was on his own range, and he had

long since grown familiar with them.

With a sudden sense of shame he had banished his unhealthy musings, and though he instinctively cast a swift glance about to make sure his folly had no observers, the musical plash of the falling water was already reminding him that his throat was parched with dust and heat, after his hot day's work on the range. And he was swinging himself from the saddle when he uttered a sharp exclamation and shading his eyes with arched palm, gazed keenly over the level plain toward the declining sun.

One hand instinctively dropped to his belt as he distinguished the shape of horse and rider rapidly drawing near. This much he could make out, but the rider was coming in a straight line with the sun, and that brilliant light par-

tially blinded him.

"Only one—and sending a yelp before him!" he muttered, stepping aside from his horse and standing with hands lightly resting upon his he means war!"

Quietly, easily, without a trace of boasting in the tones, however vauntingly the assertion may

appear in cold type.

Swiftly the stranger came on, gesticulating excitedly with arms, and shouting forth words that Laughing Leo vainly tried to catch with understanding at first, thanks to the distance and the plashing waters. But then—

"Do not drink—for your life!"

Laughing Leo gave a sharp cry, not so much at the words themselves, though they were startling enough in all conscience; but because he recognized the one who sent that warning in advance.

"Meta-lupa—the red-skin beauty!" he muttered, striding forward as though to meet the new-comer, but pausing, as there came a pant-

ing cry: "Your horse—stop him!"

Laughing Leo turned mechanically toward the buckskin, who just then turned away from the trough, taking a step or two in order to nip a mouthful of the grass growing hard by.

"If you wish, Meta, though there's little fear of his straying beyond easy recovery," said Laughlin, doffing his hat with a bow as the

"You-have you drank the water? Speakquick!" gasped the girl, bending forward and catching him by the arm with a grip that seemed almost frenzied.

"Not here, this evening," replied the young man, his eyes filled with surprise, not wholly

free from admiration. "Thank Heaven!"

The words came with a gasp of intense relief, and the little brown hand relaxed its grasp. The lithe figure swayed, and seemed on the point of falling, when Laughing Leo caught her in his strong arms, lifting her from the blanket which formed her only saddle.

He was in no great haste to lower her completely to the ground. He seemed rather to draw her closely to his breast, though this might have come from his natural bewilderment at her

strange address. But let that be as it may, the girl-woman deftly

slipped from his grasp, one hand catching hold shorn cheeks, as though he felt ashamed of his of her panting steed's mane, the other pressed brief pettishness, and in his desire to make tightly over her heart, as though to still its un-There was more than surprise in the eyes of

Leo Laughlin as he gazed at the girl before him, though it could hardly be termed love, either. For this girl-woman was brown as a berry, and wore the garb of an Indian squaw.

Yet she formed a striking, even beautiful

picture, just then.

A girl-woman; she might with equal propriety be termed either, for while she was clearly in her 'teens, her form was rarely developed, and seemed fairly perfect in her wild yet becoming and picturesque garb.

Her hair was black as the wing of a raven, hanging far down her back in two massive braids, tied at the ends with scarlet ribbon. A band of beaded doeskin encircled her temples, and aided in securing her hair, for this natural covering was all that shielded her head from the

sun.

Her eyes were large, full, black as slees', though now partly shaded by long lashes and drooping lids, like one almost overcome with emotion. Her features were clear-cut and regular as a cameo, free from the disfiguringly high cheekbones of her race, from the flattened nose and wide mouth of the modern Indian. Only for her color and her dress she might easily have passed for one of untainted white blood. Even her complexion seemed purer and her skin thinner, showing the workings of the warm blood beneath far plainer than in an ordinary red-

Her outer garb was composed almost entirely of doe or fawnskin, showing that soft, creamy yellow peculiar to the Indian tanned skins.

There were heavily beaded moccasins on her feet, and embroidered leggings, of the same material, wrapped about her legs and secured by beaded bands just below the knees. A skirt of fawnskin, wrought elaborately with beads and silk, came considerably below her knees. A tight-fitting waist, or basque, with long sleeves, completed her outward attire.

A belt of webbing encircled her round, trim waist, supporting a knife and double-action revolver. It was also plentifully supplied with cartridges, both for the pistol and for the repeating rifle which was secured in a sling to her

horse.

Laughing Leo stood gazing at this strange creature, whom he had met more than once before, though never under circumstances so curious as these. He was at a loss what to say or do, and felt just a little relieved when Meta-lupa gave a shiver, standing erect, her lustrous eyes fixed upon his as she uttered:

"You have not tasted the water? You are

sure?"

"Quite sure," with a faint smile. "My throat is parched—" "Better that than death!" was the startling

response. "And your horse?" "Is happy, as you see. But what do you

mean, Meta?"

"That your horse is poisoned—that there is death in the water you were about to drink!

Thanks to Heaven I came in time!" Laughing Leo was grave enough now. His face paled, his eyes burned with a steely light, his white teeth clicked together sharply. With a strong effort he controlled the hot rage that

leaped up within him, and spoke calmly, stead-

"I am not quite sure I understand your meaning."

"The spring is poisoned—poisoned by your enemies, who seek to remove you from their

path!" Even yet Leo Laughlin could not realize the truth. This was such a frightful crime, and its results might be so vast and widespread. For he was not the only one who used the spring. It was known throughout those vast ranges, and whoever happened to pass near rarely did so without turning aside for a cooling draught.

He knew he had enemies, bitter and unscrupulous-past events only too plainly indicated as much-but surely they would not attempt his death by such frightful means!

The Indian girl was watching him keenly, and a slight frown came into her face as she read his thoughts aright in his changing countenance.

Sharp and almost imperiously she cried, pointing to Mott:

"You doubt my warning: watch. Ha!" The dappled buckskin was no longer feeding. He was standing with drooping head, but as those words passed her lips, his head was flung up with a strange, groaning sound. His back arched, his stomach tucked up, and his limbs began to quiver spasmodically.

With a cry of angry alarm, Laughing Leo started forward, only to pause as Meta-lupa grasped his arm with her little hand, saying: "Too late! See!"

The tortured animal reared up on its hind feet, convulsively pawing the air, foam streaming from its distended jaws. One moment, then it turned partly around, falling heavily upon its side, its legs outstretched and quivering convulsively, a hollow groan coming from its lungs.

"Be careful!" cried Meta-lupa, as Laughlin broke away from her restraining grasp and rushed to the side of the dying animal. "Beware its teeth—it may poison you!"

There was a strange eagerness in her warn ing, both in voice and manner, which Laughing Leo could not entirely miss noticing, even in that moment of excitement. She sprung before him, one meccasined foot pressing lightly on the neck of the animal, ready to restrain any dangerous struggles on its part.

Laughlin bent over the poor creature, gazing into its eyes, but not for long. Past experience told him that mortal aid was in vain. The noxious drug had done its work only too well, thanks to the great thirst of the animal. And then, as a fresh spasm tortured the poor creature, Laughing Leo drew his keen knife, and with a swift stroke drove the sharp point through the spine at the base of the skull. One slight quiver, and poor Mott was off duty foreever!

Meta-kapa withdrew her foot and stepped back, a slight shiver agitating her lithe figure, but her voice was steady as she said:

"It was well and mercifully done. The poor beast was past saving, and death came as a merciful boon."

"My knife would be just as sure, but not so painless, were my hand on the dastardly whelp who peisoned the spring!" sternly grated Laughlin, his blue eyes ablaze as he turned toward the Indian maiden, adding: "You know him? Give me his name!"

Meta-lupa shrunk back, a strange pallor coming into her face, her figure shivering and drooping like one smitten with sudden fear. And until then the man did not realize how harshly, how fiercely he had spoken and looked.

Instantly his frowns vanished, and his voice grew musical:

"Little woman, you are not frightened? You "do not think I am threatening you? You, who saved my life-who drew me back from suffering the death of a sheep-killing cur? Metalook up and—"

Instead, she drew back from the arm that would have encircled her shrinking form, speaking hurriedly, brokenly:

"No, I am not afraid-I did not thinkonly, I cannot tell you who did this foul deed!" Yet, you knew of it? You came to warn me? Meta, is the wretch who would commit such a foul deed worth the defense of those sweet lips?"

"I saved you-I would have saved any other whom I found in a like peril," uttered the maiden, forcing herself to meet his half-passionate, half-reproachful gaze.

"And some day I hope to thank you for that act, more fittingly than I can thank you now, with poor Mott lying there before my eyes," was the grave response. "Add one more great boon, Meta. Tell me whose hand put poison in the spring. Tell me how you discovered it."

Meta-lupa no longer shrunk away. She stood | to such morsels. erect, her dark eyes filling with light, her red lips firmly compressed as she met his glowing gaze. A brief space thus, then she stepped forward until their hands might have met, speaking slowly, distinctly:

"You believe I saved your life?"

Laughing Leo glanced toward his dead horse as he spoke:

"There lies the proof-or was the poison simply placed in the horse trough?" "The poison was intended for your lips," was

the response. "Tell me the name of the wretch who-"

"You say I saved your life," interposed Metalupa, a swift motion just brushing his lips with the tips of her brown fingers. "If you are grateful for that act, reward me-will you?"

Laughing Leo read her meaning aright, but under the circumstances he could not hesitate. "With my life, if you will accept it, Meta,"

he said, gravely. He smiled faintly as he saw the red blood leaping swiftly beneath the brown skin. The black eyes quavered for a moment, but then bravely met his blue orbs as the girl-woman said:

"I ask my life, instead. I have already risked it to save yours; do not make me forfeit it by

telling you more." "I swear no one shall ever be the wiser for the words you may speak, Meta. Only a word-only

a name! Surely you would not shield such a dastardly cur?"

The Indian girl hesitated, her dark eyes seeking the ground, her brown fingers nervously intertwining. Laughing Leo saw his advantage, and pressed it hard.

"None but a coward would strike at a life after such a fashion! And surely you can trust me to guard your life against all such curs, Metalupa? You can trust me?" he added, his voice growing soft and musical as he gently touched her hands.

Only to have them swiftly withdrawn as the Indian girl sprung to the side of her horse, one hand raised in warning as the young man took a step toward her. Her dark eyes were glowing brightly, her red lips paling with earnestness as she motioned him back.

"Meta-lupa asks no man to protect her—and least of all a rich and proud pale-face!" the maiden cried, her voice clear as a silver bell. "I have warned you, and that I spoke truly, let of alabaster, swelling out into a matchless bust. life in coming here. I told you it would be my the warrior-queen of the Iceni, or the fabled death to say more. Yet you persisted. You-"

"I ask your pardon," with a low, grave bow. "I was too deeply excited to fully realize what was saying or doing. I thank you for what you have done, and hope some day to show you the full extent of my gratitude. Until then-"

"I ask no thanks," was the softer response. "I learned of this black deed through accident, and I came here at once to post a warning over the poisoned waters. I found you—and was fortunate in saving your life. That is all. It needs no thanks."

Laughlin laughed softly as he murmured:

"I am so utterly worthless, then?" The moment the words passed his lips, he would have given much for the power of recalling them. He saw Meta-lupa flush hotly, then turn ashen pale. He saw something like tears dim her bright eyes, but before he could see more, before he could utter another word, the Indian maiden sprung lightly upon her horse, wrenching its head around, striking it sharply with her moccasined heel, dashing away over the plain at full

And Laughing Leo stood in the red rays of the declining sun watching her, a frown upon his white brow, a troubled light filling his eyes.

speed.

He felt that he had given a poor reward for his life!

CHAPTER II.

A TENDERFOOT IN TROUBLE. "Bur, Miss Sate-"

"But, Mr. Basil Brock-I'll have no buts!" with a light laugh. "It's the coming race I want to talk about, and not such soft, silly nonsense. And there it goes again! Now you're mad!"

"Not mad, Miss McAvoy, but hurt; hurt far more than words can tell," came in low, intense accents as the speaker bent a reproachful gaze on the gay, flighty creature riding beside him.

He gave a little start as Miss Sate uttered a sharp exclamation, reining in and twisting her rosy, mischievous face over one shoulder to call

"Dad, did you ever? Mr. Brock swears he's hurt so bad he can't begin to express it! Horrible! Who'll we get to ride, now?"

"Maybe it's a suit of his clothes he'll be after lendin' ye, darlin', and then we'd have a jockey up that the divil himself couldn't bate, let alone that grinnin' baboon of a Laughlin," chuckled Finn McAvoy, his huge figure shaking with mirth at the comical idea.

Miss Sarah McAvoy joined in the laugh, and Basil Brock also made an effort in that direction, but it was a very faint and unsuccessful one. And if there wasn't the flavor of an oath under his tongue, it must have been because his sense of taste had long since grown accustomed | the hot irons.

Very brief was the young lady's laughter, then her face grew grave and anxious and her great blue eyes opened widely as they roved keenly over the figure of her cavalier.

"Would you, Mr. Brock? I wonder-would they be big enough?"

It was no use! Try as he might, Basil Brock could not remain out of humor with Sate Mc-Avoy when she strove to bring a smile to his face, and the laugh with which he joined Finn McAvoy was a genuine one this time, though a flush came to his bronzed cheeks; for where is the lover who would not prefer being at least a size or two larger than his "adorable divinity?"

And Basil Brock was very much in love with this gay, tantalizing creature, very much in earnest with his wooing: too much so, rerhaps.

Even the meekest of maidens might object to being courted right under the keen, watchful eyes of a father, out on a treeless plain, with the evening sun lighting up every action. And Sate McAvoy was far from being of the meekest, as even her ardent lover was forced to admit. More times than one he had caught himself wishing she had just a trifle less spirit.

Sarah's mother must have been a rarely beautiful woman, for certainly grim, gaunt, giant Finn McAvoy could have bestowed little of those charms that rendered "Queen Sate" a from her face. toast throughout all those vast ranges; unless it

was her superb figure, taller far than that of her

sex in general.

A perfect Amazon she looked, sitting her spirited horse with unstudied grace and natural ease, her large, yet perfectly proportioned figure revealed rather than masked by her snugly-fitting habit of seal-brown goods. One woman in a thousand both as to face and form.

A face such as you might find beside the waters of Killarney, or in the peat-flavored atmosphere of a mountain shieling; a face with the great blue eyes, the matchless complexion of milk and roses, contrasting charmingly yet strongly with the jetty black hair.

A rose-lipped mouth, a trifle wide, a thought too full, it may be, for statue que beauty, but doubly charming and seductive in one of warm flesh and blood. A nose just tip-titled enough to give an enemy the ghost of an excuse for whispering "pug." A chin that betrayed strength and self-will. A throat like a column yonder carcass bear witness. I said that I risked | A figure such as one instinctively attributes to Semiramis.

Little wonder, then, that Basil Brock was over head and ears in love with his fair neighbor, or that he improved every opportunity for pressing his suit, knowing as he did that Finn McAvoy was wishing him success with all his heart.

And, so far as outward appearances went, the fair Sarah might have gone further to fare worse. Basil Brock was a good-looking young man, well-educated, and fairly well off in the matter of this world's goods, with the best of projects for ranking high among the "cattle barons" of the Northern Ranges long before his head should begin to show the first frosts of coming age.

Fortune had favored him mightily since his entrance into the stock-raising field. Everything his hands touched seemed to turn to gold, and his most reckless ventures were the very ones to "pan out" the most profitably.

He was no "carpet knight," though he could have held his own in almost any society. He was a magnificent rider, judged by the roughand-ready rules of the range. He had nerve and grit enough for any ordinary emergency. He could handle a "rope" with the best of his men, and was "no slouch" with rifle or revol-

Little wonder, then, when he came a-wooing, that Finn McAvoy greeted him with smiles and a warm clasp of the hand. Little wonder that "Queen Sate" showed no slight fancy for the dashing young stockman, since his tastes seemed to chime in so perfectly with her

own. But Basil Brock was far from satisfied. His wooing had not lacked for heat or ardency, but this day he felt that he was full as far from complete success as when he took the first step toward the prize. With an inward curse, he felt that he was still further away.

It was the season of the "Fall round-up," and this was the concluding day of that arduous task.

For two weeks past master and men had been working hard, gathering in the scattered "bunches" of cattle, marking, branding, culling out for market such as had been left over from the earlier "drive."

According to custom, every ranch within miles and miles had been represented, all working together, chosen riders from each ranch taking turns in "cutting out" stock bearing their respective brands, until the last bunch was attended to. Then the unbranded stock—the Mavericks without mark-were put up at auction, the proceeds to revert to the Stockgrowers' Association, and the cattle themselves to be caught, thrown, marked and seared with

It was to witness this sport-for sport it is, barbarous though it sounds to the cold earthat Sate McAvoy accompanied her father to the round-up that day. And under her sparkling eyes the warm-blooded ranchers had fairly outdone themselves in their exploits. And when Queen Sate herself cast a rope—true and deftly as the surest hand among them all—the heavens echoed again with wild, enthusiastic cheers. And had she expressed the wish, Queen Sate might have walked from the round-up to the distant McAvoy Ranch without once touching the ground with her trim feet. One beautyintoxicated rancher declared as much, and offered his body as the first stepping-stone, her light laugh being drowned by the eager shouts of her admirers who seconded the unique proposal. Only one voice was silent. Only one face remained cold and even cynical.

She saw that face now, and the smiles faded from her face. Her armed heel savagely pricked her steed, and with a wild plunge sideways he almost upset the horse ridden by Basil Brock. With slackened reins she darted away over the plain, and though Brock set out in hasty pursuit, foolishly fancying her horse had broken away and was beyond her control, she kept her distance until she drove that haunting face from her mind, that pale, almost haggard look

She turned toward her agitated lover, smiling

brightly, a mocking light in her great eyes as she cried:

"You must practice starting, my dear fellow, or you'll get left in more senses than one to-morrow. Unless you lead at the start, you'll follow at the finish. With Laughing Leo on its back, that black demon will race from end to end!"

"I thought you were being run away with, darling!" exclaimed the rancher, with a long breath of relief.

"And, as usual, you come in one day too late for the fair!" with a malicious laugh, as a touch of the armed heel caused her steed to sidle off to a more respectful distance, from the arm that sought to clasp her round waist. "An omen! I'll hedge my bets! Make me an offer, Mr.

Brock, and if it's anything in reason—" "My hand and heart, dear Sate, if-" "I carry no small change, Mr. Brock," was the swift, sharp interposition. "I said in reason, while you ask entirely too long odds."

"What's that?" cried Finn McAvoy, riding up. "Betting, without giving the ould man a chance at the pie? What is it he's offerin' ye, little woman?"

"A mere trifle—not worth mentioning, dad," laughed Sate, turning away to hide an admirably simulated yawn with her gloved hand.

"She asked me to make her an offer, and I offered her my heart and hand, sir," stiffly muttered the white-faced lover, choking down his hot rage as best he could.

"A thrifle, she called it!" and Finn McAvoy leaned back in his saddle, roaring until the tears stood in his big eyes. "Sate Ann, ye'll be the death o' me yit, so ye will, now!"

"It'll be justifiable homicide, then, with your

Sate-ahems!" Sarah Anne turned upon the laughing giant with uplifted whip, only to drop her arm and shade her eyes with the member, leaning forward in the saddle as she gazed keenly over the plain at an object just then discovered.

A riderless horse had moved out from behind a small patch of brush and weeds, and was standing with head erect, looking at them with

a startled curiosity. "A horse—and a strange one, too!" exclaimed Brock, for the moment forgetting his grievance. "Look at the saddle-an English pad, as I'm a sinner! Some tenderfoot has come to

grief, sure as shooting!" Even as he uttered the words, Sate was fingering the neatly coiled lasso that hung at her sad-

dle-bow, and now she cried out: "Dollars to cents that I get first rope, Basil

Brock! The fair sex forever!"

Away she dashed, her keen spur pricking the flanks of her willing steed with hearty good will. And its cat-like quickness secured for its fair mistress several lengths the start before Basil Brock fully comprehended the meaning of her hasty speech.

With a vicious plunge of his spurs he dashed in pursuit, and in a score of bounds had almost regained his lost distance. A backward glance showed him Finn McAvoy leisurely trotting after them, already out of earshot. And with intense earnestness he uttered:

"A wager, but not in coin, fair Sate! Hand for hand, heart for heart! Dare you accept the

wager?" "I dare, but I don't choose," was the sharp response. "Don't be a bigger fool than nature intended, Basil Brock! Keep your love-making for those who can appreciate it—and her name is not Sarah Anne McAvoy!"

Another savage plunge of the spurs carried him to her side, and he leaned over in the saddle until their eyes met. Despite her nerve, remarkably great for one of her sex, Queen Sate shrunk away just a trifle as she saw that red, desperate glow in his eyes.

"Do you mean that, Sarah McAvoy? Have I no chance? Do you give me hate where I ask

for love? Once for all, Sate!" She read more in his glowing eyes than came from his tongue, and for once she was at a loss just what to reply. Only for a moment. A bright, arch glance shot through her drooping

lashes, and she murmured: "Love and murder, all in a breath! And with honest dad watching every move we make and word we utter! Be aisy, now, Basil, can't

ye?" Not much, to be sure, but Basil Brock was too desperately hungry for even the veriest crumb of comfort to be over-critical just then. That hard, desperate look softened, and he mut-

tered: "Then I may hope, darling?"

"It's not I that'll hinder ye, sure!" with a light laugh, as Queen Sate looked once more toward the stray horse, which had taken the alarm at their rapid advance and was now galloping away, though with a perceptible limp in one fore-foot. "If ye want more, ye must earn it! An hour's interview after supper, that 1 take the first rope!"

"Against what? Granted, whatever odds you ask!"

"I'll tell ye when I've won the stakes," with a

laugh. For the first time Basil Brock touched his lasso, his face pale and hard-set, his dark eyes

all aglow. And as Queen Sate glanced at him sideways, she knew that he was determined to win if possible.

Her own face paled a little, though in that alone she showed her uneasiness. There was more in this man than she had given him credit for. Until now he had been so easily managed, led on one moment, only to be driven away in mute despair the next, as she tired of the sport.

She saw that the end was near. The stray horse was too lame for anything like a long race against their picked mounts. They were overhauling him rapidly. Five minutes at the outside would decide. Should she lose, she knew that Basil Brock would hold her to her wager. And she knew that he would press his advantage to the utmost; that when that interview ended. she would be his promised wife, or he would be an enemy to be dreaded.

Her red lips compressed tightly as she kept close beside her cavalier, riding at his right hand. She saw him smile grimly, as though he divined her purpose, but he made no attempt to change his position, or to increase the distance between them. This was far too close for the management of a lasso on his part, yet he did not seem greatly disturbed.

Nearer and nearer the stray, until Queen Sate felt that they were within lasso-distance, and she swung the coil about her head, shooting a side-glance at her rival as she did so. To see him quickly shift his lasso to his left hand, using it with a freedom that recalled his ambidexterity.

"Now, Queen Sate!" he cried, with unconcealed triumph as the snake-like coils whirred about his head.

But he exulted too soon. Swift as thought the Amazon flung up her lasso, still tightly gripping the coils, striking his rope just as it was on the point of leaving his hand to shoot forward and close over the neck of the estray.

Her aim was true, and the lasso fell in a tangled knot just over the head of his own horse, catching in its feet and bringing both it and its rider to the ground, while Queen Sate shot ahead with a merry laugh, crying out clearly:

"All's fair in love or war, Mr. Brock! An

Irish girl never loses!" Even as the words passed her lips, the coil shot out and hovered for a moment over the head of the estray, then closed about its throat. Her trained steed stopped short, bracing itself for the expected shock. It came, but not heavily. The estray had apparently felt that choking noose before, and stopped as quickly as possible, trembling in every limb, but making no effort to break away.

Rapidly as this feat was performed, when Queen Sate turned to look back after her defeated lover, Basil Brock was on his feet and leaping into the saddle. His face streaked with dirt and blood, the last from a superficial gash on his forehead, the young man rode up and past her, saying not a word until he had secured the estray with his own halter, recoiled her lasso as he came back, fastening it in place at her saddle-bow.

"You won, Miss McAvoy," he said, coldly, never looking up to meet her steady, slightly anxious gaze.

"Through a trick—but I had to, Mr. Brock! It breaks my heart entirely to lose—even to the

dearest of friends!" He flushed a little at this ending; it came so soft, so sweet, after the slightest possible pause. But his voice was cold as before when he spoke again:

"And I am the man you dislike the most, of

course." "Did I say that, now?" with almost tender reproach, and—was it a tear that rendered her

great eyes so lustrous as he glanced up? "As well say it as think it," he muttered, his tones growing unsteady, his eyes drooping with a sense of shame, for he felt that he was again falling under that bewitching spell. "Miss Mc-Avov-"

"What's the matter with Sate?" came a soft whisper, and he felt a warm, perfumed breath fanning his ear.

He looked up, to meet her eyes, filled with a half-pitying, half-mocking light. And then, with a swiftness that defied evasion, his lips fairly touched hers in a hot, burning kiss.

Queen Sate drew swiftly back, but too late to foil him. Her eyes flashed, and her whip-hand uplifted, but he never flinched, never made a move to defend himself or to foil her vengeance. And then—she leaned back in her saddle, laughing heartily.

"That is trick for trick, and ye're no gentleman if ye say ye haven't the best of the exchange, Basil Brock!" she cried, reining her steed back a pace or two, but facing him with a bright smile.

"For another—given, not stolen—I'd exchange Heaven for hell!" he slowly uttered, his burning gaze fixing hers for a moment.

"Ye'll wait long for that same, Basil Brock, unless— Whist! the father is coming up! If he was to suspect what-"

"What brand, Brock?" cried out Finn Mc-Avoy, with a jolly heartiness that lainly proved he had not witnessed that little episode.

"A stray, from the looks," muttered Brock,

who had given the horse not a single thought after his failure.

Still, his supposition proved correct. There were no brands or marks familiar to their eyes, and this fact, with the flat saddle, so abominable in the estimation of all who have learned the art of riding in a prairie school, led them into looking around in quest of the owner.

"The reins are broken and were hanging free. He has had a fall, from the looks of his knees. What that means, to a greenhorn on a saddle like that, isn't hard to guess," tersely uttered Basil.

With a deftness that told this was not her first exploit of the sort, Queen Sate gathered her short skirts and stood erect on her saddle, glancing keenly around the horizon. She had scarcely swept a quarter of the compass before she uttered a low ejaculation.

"What is it, girl?" demanded Finn McAvoy, taking the direction from her eyes, rising high in his stirrups to better his view.

"A bunch of cattle—isn't that where the table-rock stands?" stretching out her whip-

"Sure it's the right direction, anyhow!" replied McAvoy, with a searching glance about them to perfect his memory. "Is it anything but stock, little woman?"

"They surround the rock—they are acting as though mad-I see something-it is our tenderfoot, I reckon!" dropping to the saddle and slipping her foot into the stirrup, shaking the reins and dashing away at full speed, closely followed by Basil Brock.

Finn McAvoy paused only long enough to knot the free end of the halter around one ankle of the lame horse, then dashed after the young couple, freeing his long stock-whip from its resting-place behind his saddle.

Side by side the young people dashed on, quickly gaining a clearer view of the table-rock, as the huge bowlder was called. This was some ten feet high, and nearly square in shape, its top as smooth and level as though the chisel of man had shaped it.

Nearly two hundred cattle now crowded around the rock, bellowing in low, deep, angry tones, pawing the ground, casting clods of dry dirt high into the air with their keen horns, evidently greatly excited or enraged about something. And as the riders came into clear view, that something stood erect upon the table-rock, gesticulating wildly with both arms; for that something was a man.

"Wild buffaloes! Beware their horns!" came floating across the space, causing Queen Sate to stare and Basil Brock to laugh.

"Buffalo! A tenderfoot, sure enough!" ex-

claimed the rancher. He lifted his head and shouted at the top of his voice, in tones so readily recognized by even the wildest of range cattle. The tumult ceased as by magic, and great eyes were turned upon them, half-angrily, half-frightened. And as the twain thundered direct at them, shouting and waving their arms, Basil Brock sending out a volley of pistol-like reports from his stockwhip, the cattle broke away in a wild stampede,

not waiting for closer acquaintance. The man on the table-rock stood staring in open-mouthed amazement at this precipitate flight, so simply brought about, and not until the silvery voice of Queen Sate called to him, did he turn with a start, one hand mechanically rising to his bare head as he recognized a lady.

"Marvelous-extraordinary-incredible-yet true!" he gasped, casting a glance over his shoulder toward the fleeing cattle. "Gone-put to flight—eh?"

"Because we were mounted, sir," laughed Queen Sate, curiously eying the stranger. "Had we been afoot, only some such refuge as this could have saved us from being trampled to pomace."

"Then they aren't-I thought they were buffalo!"

"Minus the humps," laughed Basil Brock. The stranger nodded vigorously, clapping a hand to his thigh with a sharp report as he ejaculated:

"That's it! I thought there was something lacking-they didn't look quite familiar-though they acted too awfully so!" with a rueful laugh and a side-glance at the bright face of Queen Sate. "Invited me to take a horn, without stopping for an introduction! Eh?"

Queen Sate laughed at this moldy chestnut, but Basil Brock only frowned. He was of too jealous a disposition to relish the idea of a fresh acquisition to their little circle. And greenhorn though he seemed, the stranger was far from being a bad-looking fellow.

Of medium hight, but of athletic build. Clad in rather flashy garb of latest cut; Prince Albert coat, vest, trowsers, fine boots; standing collar and neat tie; an imitation diamond in his stiff shirt-front, and huge cameos in his cuffs; a bright, large-linked chain crossed his vest. Hat he had none, having doubtless lost it during his scramble up the almost perpendicular side of the table-rock.

"There's my horse now—the ugly brute!" he exclaimed, catching sight of Finn McAvoy, who had returned after the animal as soon as he saw

his swifter companions had put the stock to flight. "I'm ever so much obliged to you for saving my life," he added, leaping lightly to the ground, giving a little twist of his face as he did so. "Confound that horse! They war anted him sure-footed, and the first thing-ow!"

"You are injured, I fear?" softly uttered Queen Sate, bending over in the saddle as the stranger suddenly "favored" one foot.

"Only a wrench-not worth mentioning, ma'am." with a faint smile that apparently covered no little pain.

Basil Brock leaped to the ground and knelt to examine the injured ankle. Not wholly prompted by kindness, it must be said, but more to forestall the sympathy of the woman he loved. "No bones broken, that I can see," he mut-

tered, presently. "Then we'll make no more bones about it," smiled the stranger, who seemed rather partial

to feeble jests. Finn McAvoy just then rode up, and the stranger at once took possession of his horse, climbing into the saddle after anything but a graceful manner, not a little to the contempt of the young rancher, who waited until the other's eyes were upon him, then vaulted into his saddle without touching stirrup, frowning a little

as the stranger turned away without a remark

on his adroitness, to answer Finn McAvoy. No need to repeat his explanation in extenso since it was long-drawn-out by the glib-tongued stranger. A stumble of his horse, caused by breaking through some sort of burrow, flung him from the saddle, and he failed to catch the animal, chasing him for a long time and over several miles. Then, losing sight of his horse, he wandered on until sighted by the herd of cattle. They, unused to the sight of a man on foot, soon closed in on him, and only the table-rock saved him from a frightfui death beneath their hoofs.

"I foolishly took them for a sort of buffalo, though I did miss their humps, as I've seen them pictured in looks," with a frank laugh at his own greenness. "I'm awfully grateful to you all, and if you ever come to town, I'll try to get even. And that reminds me," with an abrupt transition. "Can you tell me where I might find a gentleman named Melchoir Parkindale?"

Was it only fancy, or did father and daughter interchange a look of startled uneasiness?

CHAPTER III.

NOT EXACTLY A BED OF ROSES.

LAUGHING LEO stood motionless watching the rapidly receding figure of Meta-lupa as long as it remained within his range of vision; but that was not long. Veering to the right, the Indian beauty sw pt around the point of rocks, vanishing from view. The young rancher drew a long breath that was almost a sigh: so nearly one that it startled even himself, and his cheeks flushed hotly as he cast a swift glance about him.

What was it that brought the bright, saucy face of Queen Sate up before him so distinctly, just then?

In that wandering gaze, his eyes fell upon the carcass of his good horse Mott, and a hard, dangerous light came into them. With a toss of his head, like one who seeks to cast aside all disagreeable thoughts, Leo Laughlin sprung into life and action.

"Poison, beyond a doubt!" he muttered, stooping over Mott and gazing keenly into the glazed eyes. "Not strychnine, for, freely as the poor fellow drank, he couldn't have swallowed three or four ounces of the infernal stuff. and less than that won't knock a horse over so suddenly."*

Laughing Lee turned to the trough, closely examining its contents, but without making any ediscovery. He hardly expected to do so, after the words of Meta-lupa. And yet, how account for the sudden death of poor old Mott?

The water was running freely, overflowing through the notch cut in the lower end of the long trough, thus preventing an overflow at either side, keeping the ground about the trough dry and firm. The water falling from the little spout kept the contents of the trough pretty well stirred up, thus insuring a complete change every few minutes.

Laughing Lee turned away from the trough

with a frown.

"Not in here, as I might have known. And

she said so." As he muttered these words, Laughing Leo cast a glance out in the direction where Metalupa had disappeared from sight. After all, it was natural enough that his thoughts should revert to the Indian girl at brief intervals. She had undoubtedly saved his life. Only for her coming, he would have drank heartily of the cool waters, and by now be lying a corpse, the helpless victim of a vengeance as horrible as it was mysterious.

"If I could have drawn the truth from her lips!" he muttered, his gloved hands clinching tightly, his teeth clicking and his eyes flashing

*A fact. While two or three grains of strychnine will kill a dog, it requires fully as many ounces of the drug to affect a horse after a like fashion.

with a dangerous fire. "Only a bint—only the ghost of a clew! I'd never know rest until I ran the fiend to earth, and then-"

He left the hiatus unfilled by words, but there was no need for more open speech. Punishment would swiftly follow discovery, and that punishment would be death at the hands of the man who had so narrowly escaped falling a sacrifice to this diabolical plot.

Satisfied that the poison could not have been placed in the horse-trough itself, Laughing Leo looked around further. Footprints of both man and beast were plenty enough, but nothing could be learned from an examination of these. Where so many had stopped at the spring, who could pick out a certain set and say that these were the marks left behind by the foul assassin?

He knelt on the smooth, flat stone beside the chiseled basin in the rock, removing the heavy slab that covered the little well of water. It was pure and limpid, giving no signs to the outward eye of the deadly drug with which it was so strongly impregnated. There was no sediment at the bottom, save a few particles of stone that had fallen into the basin as Laughing Leo uncovered it.

Frowning darker than ever, Laughing Leo replaced the covering. He could no longer doubt. It had seemed incredible that any one could be fiendish enough to poison a fount at which any one of a hundred men might drink at any hour of the day.

"There is poison, plain enough," with a side glauce at the carcass of poor Mott. "It is in the water, too. Mott was well enough before he drank so freely-poor fellow! If I had carried my cruel lesson a little further! If -bah!" with a short, hard laugh. "I did not, and he suffered. How much, let the demon who set the ball to rolling tell when I've got him by the throat."

Hardly "Laughing Leo" just then. Pale as a corpse, with set jaws, and a white, pinched look about his flexible nostrils; with eyes that glowed with a reddish light, and pupils that contracted until they were almost invisible. Had the dastardly poisoner seen his intended victim just then, he might well have trembled for the result.

"If only for stock, I wouldn't think so much about it," he muttered, his brows wrinkling. "That would simply be of a piece with all the rest; but it's worse than that! The stuff is not between this and the trough, and that proves her words true—the demon intended murder!"

There could be no other interpretation placed on the affair. If the drug was meant only for stock, it would have been placed below the basin at which all men were accustomed to drink. If simply dropped into the trough the poisoned water would long since have run away. If in the spout leading from basin to trough, something to indicate this must have been discovered by his close scrutiny.

With these thoughts flitting through his brain, Leo Laughlin turned his attention above the basin, where the ground was moist and wet with the spring waters; and scarcely had he done so before a sharp ejaculation broke from his lips, and he sprung forward, believing that at last be had solved the mystery.

The impress of a human hand, imperfect but unmistakable, in the soft earth above. And the print of a bended knee only a slight distance below the hand-mark.

Not much, but quite enough to give Laughing

Leo the clew he sought.

"Made this very day!" he muttered, bending over the tell-tale sign. "A man knelt there. What for? Not to drink, with the basin so convenient just below. What made him try to rub out the print his left hand made when it slipped from this bit of rock?"

Even as the words hissed through his clinched teeth, Leo Laughlin was looking about for the answer. And in another moment he believed that answer was found.

With his knife he set to work, scraping away the mud and picking out the bits of stone covering a point where, as he now recalled, the main vein of the spring had once been laid bare. It was covered up now, and he believed he knew why and when.

"It was uncovered only two days ago. It may have been filled up by accident, but I don't believe it. I believe—I know it now!"

His knife was grating over a flat stone, and his fingers quickly scooped away the moist dirt, laying bare a flat flake of rock more than a foot square. And as he lifted this, a savage cry escaped his lips.

Beneath, lying across the vein of water, yet in such a manner as to permit the fluid to pass on, was a mud-stained bag, tightly tied up.

Laughing Leo knew that the first part of his search was ended now, and he lifted the bag from the water, finding it soft, but very heavy for its size. A touch of his knife cut the string, and the bag was opened, revealing a pasty, whitish mass, but which had a curious, mineral-like feeling between his thumb and forefinger as he lightly tested it.

The first glance assured him that it was not strychnine, for he had more than once made use of that powerful drug in poisoning wolves. What it was, he could not be positive from this

hasty inspection, but he fancied that it must be arsenic. The unusual weight helped him to this conclusion.

Carefully laying the sack aside, he pursued his investigation, and in a few moments more was rewarded by another discovery. A few inches lower down, yet in the same vein of water, he found a second package, much smaller than the first, and looking like a compound of powdered herbs of some description. Then, when the vein had been followed down to where it entered the stone basin without any further discoveries. Laughing Leo took the two packages and regained the level by the horse-trough.

Carrying water to one side he carefully washed the muddy sacks, scanning them inch by inch in hopes of gaining a clew, however faint, to the dastardly author of this outrage, but in vain. The larger sack was simply one which had contained buckshot, from a Chicago shot-tower, and bore no further distinguishing marks. The smaller receptacle was of coarse woolen, rudely stitched with cord; part of an old army-blanket to all appearance.

"There's only one thing clear enough to swear by: no friend put them there! But which one of my enemies? A wide range for selection, the foul fiend knows.

He retied the packages, laying them carefully on one side as he hunted up a couple of sticks, the ends of which he cleft with his knife, planting one beside the stone basin, which he filled with mud and tightly packed it down, then stuck the other stick upright beside the carcass of his poisoned horse. He tore some leaves from a note-book, printing the word "poison" on each in large, bold characters, placing the warning notice in each of the cleft sticks.

While thus occupied, his brain was very busy, and something of his reflections must be given in this connection, for the better understanding of what is to follow.

His had been a strange, eventful life, almost from his birth.

His mother was an Italian, and when a child she made a precarious living posing as a model. When yet a child in years, she was taken away by an old man, a wealthy, titled German, who married her. A child was born to them, and named Leopold-Laughing Leo, as we know him.

After a few years there was a tragedy. Herman Burvenich was discovered dead in his bed, a dagger driven through his heart. His wife and child were gone, no one could say whither.

The widow—under another name and character, however-came to America. As Leopold grew older, she separated from him. Already he was looking too old to be the son of his mother—one of those occasional beings who show no trace of passing years after reaching woman-

She married a wealthy old fur-trader named Morris Kirkendall, but his wedded bliss did not last long. His eyes were rudely opened, and the beautiful adventuress fled "with a handsomer man." There was a long and bitter pursuit—an overtaking and a tragedy—but with this our story has nothing to do. Enough that. though Morris Kirkendall firmly believed that the woman who had covered his honors ble name with shame and sorrow was dead, she still lived to cross his path when he least expected it.*

It was not difficult for so cunning a woman to make a son, who had been kept in ignorance of her worst traits, believe her much more wronged than sinful, and right willingly Leopold joined with her in an attempt for revenge on Morris Kirkendall, who had blazoned her shame to the wide world.

This was many years after Morris Kirkendall completed his vengeance, as he believed. He had first secured a divorce. And then, when the bitter wound was healed, he married again. His second wife lived barely long enough to teach her baby girl how to talk, then she died.

During these years Leopold Burvenich was left to make his own way in the world, and with such wild, fiery blood in his veins, it is little marvel that he should have grown reckless, even sinful; the wonder is that he proved no worse.

Naturally, there was little love between mother and son, living apart as they had from his childhood. Leopold acknowledged her claims, when she preferred them, but that was about all. He joined in her vengeful plans, more through a love for excitement and adventure, than from a sense of duty or of love.

The "She Wolf," as Morris Kirkendall called Lena Burvenich, had not entirely lost sight of the man whom she had wronged so bitterly. She knew that he had married again, and that he had a daughter, young and lovely, pure and innocent. At that daughter she resolved to aim her first blow.

She sent her son, who changed his name to Leo Laughlin, to secure a footing in the household of the fur-trader, and bidding him, if possible, teach the girl to love him. Leo was nothing loth, and fortune seemed to favor him from the very start. He secured a clerkship in Morris Kirkendall's store, and before many moons had improved on the plans of his mother by falling in love with Luada Kirkendall.

^{*} Note. - See Beadle's Lime Libra y, No. 839.

That love was not returned, for Luada loved a young man named Jesse Purchass, also in the

employ of her father.

Morris Kirkendall rather favored Leo, having taken a strong dislike to Purchass, whose face reminded him of the "She Wolf." And when Purchass pressed his suit, the choleric old fellow broke out into a storm of angry ridicule, calling him a weakling, the shadow of a man, reminding him that Luada came from pure western stock, and that only a man, with all that word implies, could ever hope to mate with her.

Kirkendall, to put an end to a disagreeable scene, and to forever banish this presumptuous lover, bade him begone; bade him go out on the Buffalo Range and search for a noted hidehunter known as Spread Eagle Sam; bade him prove his manhood by spending a winter there, his skill by making a record to equal that of the King of the Buffalo Range.

"Then come back, an' I'll talk to you, sonny!"

he chuckled.

It was a hard task, but Jesse Purchass proved himself equal to it. He spent six months learning the use of firearms, in tempering his muscles, then sought out Spread Eagle Sam, frankly

telling him his story.

Much more boldly than Jesse Purchass, Laughing Leo told his love, and Morris Kirkendall, having not the ghost of an idea that the test would ever be accepted, made much the same answer that he had given the other presumptuous fellow who tried to rob him of his "Beauty-bird."

The test was accepted, and that same fall the trial came off. Leo was in a fair way of winning, when Luada begged Jesse to interfere. He obeyed, though he knew he was bringing disgrace upon his own head by thus violating the laws of the contest. Leo failed, but there were exciting scenes in camp when the She Wolf struck her blow.

She stole away Luada, but Spread Eagle Sam rescued her, the She Wolf, when defeat stared her in the face, taking her own life rather than be captured. She died, exulting in the fact that Luada was in the power of her son, who would bitterly avenge the death of his mother.

Instead, Laughing Leo, now fully realizing the utter hopelessness of gaining the heart of the maiden whom he had learned to love so ardently, carried her to her father, then taking his departure, just as Spread Eagle Sam camo hot upon his trail. From Sam's lips he learned of his mother's suicide, and then rode away, to be seen no more by the Kirkendalls.

Associated with the She Wolf, and madly in love with her, was a man who gave the name of Major John Westgate. He admitted that he had been dismissed from the regular army in disgrace; that he had a wife then living. His passion was so intense, that he offered to remove his wife, if the She Wolf would flee with him to a land where their past would be unknown.

The She Wolf toyed with him, now soothing, now driving him wild with her mockery. And then, when she had Luada Kirkendall helplessly in her power, and, inflamed with drink, proposed to torture the girl, Westgate interposed. In her fury she stabbed him to the

heart. After the tragedy, his brightest hopes ruined, Leo Laughlin wandered out into the stock ranges of Montana and Wyoming. Here he fell in with Spread Eagle Sam, whose heart he had won by first thrashing the herculean hidehunter, then beating him with his own pet wea-

pons. Sam's occupation was gone. The last buffalo had given up the ghost; if not the very last, so near it that there was no longer money in hidehunting. Spread Eagle could not live in the cities. He wanted room to spread himself; to clap his wings and send forth his eagle-scream without fear of disturbing querulous neighbors. And in these vast ranges he saw his chance for a new, but not less suitable life.

He and Laughing Leo at once fraternized. They each had a snug sum of money, and Morris Kirkendall would supply them with as much more as they could wish. There was "big money" in stock-raising. And so, within a month, a range was secured, stock bought, with the necessary buildings, and the firm of "Laughlin & Ingalls" was added to the Stock Growers' Association.

Anticipation was very well, but realization proved very different. At first the new firm prosp red, and were making money, "hand over fist," but then came strange and unex-

pected complications.

Their neighbors anybody within a county or two is regarded as a neighbor on the rangegrew cold and disagreeable, avoiding their company as much as possible. Accident after accident happened to their stock. There were an unusual number of wild stampedes for which their herders could not account satisfactorily. Their choicest stock were stolen, and others found dead; how killed or by whom, could only be surmised. The crimes were so adroitly committed that not even the shadow of a clew was left behind.

One of the most open in his enmity was Basil Brock, one of the wealthiest ranchers in that

district. More than once he had given cause for a fracas, had Laughing Leo not marked out for himself a new and purer course from that which he had followed in early life. More than once had Spread Eagle Sam begged his partner to read the conceited young fellow a lesson.

"You kin do it, an' not hafe try, pardner! Jes' set them little steam-hammers o' yourn to work 'bout his fizzymahog, an' his own mother wouldn't 'knowledge her kid in ten seconds! Do it—he wants it! He wants it monstrous bad, pardner!"

But Laughing Leo shook his head, smiling

faintly as he replied:

"That would be only the beginning, Sam. Shots would follow blows, and I've sworn off. want to live a quiet life, if I can. There's sins enough in the past to account for-worse luck!" "But you won't let him rub it in?" indignantly.

"Not if I can keep out of his way," with a soft

laugh.

Laughlin was at no loss to account for this strong antipathy on the part of Basil Brock. He knew that the young rancher was madly in love with the "Belle of the Range," Queen Sate. And he knew, too, that the fair Sarah Anne was rather inclined to smile upon himself, instead of returning that adoration,

He was thinking now of all this; recalling how persistent Basil Brock had been during that just finished round-up, in "crowding" him. He had finally succeeded in bantering Leo into a race, between their own pick of horses, for a stake of five hundred head of three-year-old steers-no mean stake for even the richest of ranchers.

"I don't want to lay it at his door, but who else could do it?" muttered Laughing Leo, moodily gazing at the swelling carcass of his once good steed. "Who else hates me bad enough to lead them to such a dastardly crime? No one!"

He was forced to come to this conclusion, yet it failed to satisfy him. Rude, insolent, disagreeable as Basil Brock had shown himself from the very first, he did not appear capable of such a dastardly deed. He was more apt to strike

with knife or speed a hot bullet.

Only for the spot in which the poison had been placed, Laughing Leo could more readily have believed what reason told him must be true. Five hundred head of market steers was a heavy stake for even a rich rancher like Basil Brock to lose; as lose he surely would, unless something happened to cripple or kill the favorite black racer of the Laughlin & Ingalls Ranch. Had the drugs been placed so as to poison only the be so hard. Hatred and covetousness-for the race was positively "play or pay"-might drive Basil Brock that far. But to murder? To poisoning the spring from which any one of the ranchers might drink?

"I won't believe it until I have to!" muttered Laughlin, shaking himself as though in the effort to cast off such horrible doubts. "He may be innocent. I'll accuse no man, even in my mind, without more positive proof. If she would only speak out! If she only would! She must! She cannot refuse, when I place the case fairly before her! She must see that while this cowardly wretch is at liberty, the lives of honest men are at his mercy. She must "

Leo gave a sudden start, his eyes opening widely.

"Who can she be shielding? Surely not her father-not Old John? Bah!" with a short laugh at the ridiculous idea. "I never even met the old fellow! He can have no cause to poison me, and I'm crazy to even dream of such a

Again he stopped short in his musings, this time springing to his feet, hand on weapons. For sharp and rapid came the crack-crackcracking of pistol-shots.

ridiculous idea! Why, one might as well-"

THE LOCOED RACER.

his poisoned horse, against which he had leaned his Winchester, one hand extended to grasp that weapon, while the other drew a revolver from his belt. All this before even his quick eyes could distinguish the figure of a single horseman riding rapidly toward him; all this the purely mechanical celerity which he had learned during his adventurous life. For even as his gaze fell upon the horseman he recognized him for a friend, not an enemy.

"Spread Eagle-and in such a hnrry," dropped from his lips as he straightened up without touching the repeating-rifle, using that hand to make a quick signal above his head. "There's more trouble, or I'm an angel with wings full

grown,"

One thing was self-evident—the ex-hide-hunter was greatly excited about something. He was riding at the top speed of a good horse, and though he was no longer discharging the shots that had attracted the attention of his partner, he was swinging his great hat above his head and sending a long-drawn yell before him. And it was this yell, so different from the exultant eagle-scream for which Spread Eagle Sam was famous throughout the Buffalo Ranges that told Laughing Leo it was no glad tidings his partner brought.

"More deviltry, of course!" with a hard, sterm frown, as he cast a glance at the carcass of his good steed. "Not blacker than I have to give in return, though."

The glow in his eyes deepened as he saw Spread. Eagle Sam rising in his stirrups as he came nearer, craning his head forward, evidently puzzled to understand what he saw. He leaned against the watering-trough, his arms folded. closely over his swelling chest, his jaws firmly

Spread Eagle Sam dashed up to the spot, casting only a single glance into the white, bard-set face of his partner as he leaped from the saddle. Laughing Leo caught the horse by the head, holding him away from the trough.

Spread Eagle Sam strode over to where poor Mott had fallen, his keen eyes first noting the blood which had flowed from the deft deathwound in the spine. Stooping, he scanned this, and the cleanness of the cut, the precision of its: delivery, told him much more than it would have told ordinary men.

His lips closed tightly, his nostrils began to quiver as his big eyes roved rapidly over the swelling carcass, lingering longest at the head,. where the open jaws revealed the froth-covered tongue. He stooped lower, opening the jaws and glancing keenly at the roof of the mouth, then rising erect and turning toward Laughing Leo. ejaculating:

"P'izen! Pard?"

That title contained a world of questioning, and Laughlin so understood it.. He nodded his: head shortly, then led the horse which Sam Ingalls had ridden thither to one side, knotting the trail-rope around a rock spur.

"He won't stray, pard," called out Sam, perplexed by this unusual caution. "He wants a mouthful o' cold water, I reckon, an'-"

"So did Mott, and you see what come of it!" Spread Eagle uttered a sharp ejaculation, his brows gathering dark as a thunder-cloud. "You don't mean-"

"The spring has been poisoned. Why do you marvel?" with a hard, disagreeable laugh as heretraced his steps. "Is it so strange? Isn't it what those nameless hell-bounds have been leading up to for a year past? I only wonder it has been delayed so long!"

"P'izened the trough! P'izened—to murder dumb critters fer ugly spite! P'izened-I cain't make it come reasonable, nohow! Pard?"

Spread Eagle Sam brushed a broad hand across his eyes as he stared stupidly into the white face of his Dandy Pard. Thousands of water intended for stock, the solution would not dumb brutes had fallen by his hands, but only in the way of business. He had even used poison to thin out the annoying gangs of wolves: and coyotes that infested his range while hidehunting. But to poison a horse! To poison a watering-place free to the whole community. and one as much frequented as this! It was absolutely incredible.

A strangely cold smile crept into the handsome face of Leo Laughlin as he grasped his: partner by the arm and led him to where the two sacks of poison still lay. The smile deepened as Spread Eagle Sam took them in his hands and silently examined their contents. And that smile became an audible laugh as he led the stupefied giant up the slope and showed him from whence the poison had been taken.

Strong though his perves were, Sam Ingalls: shivered as that laugh grated on his ears. And only for the deep coating of tan on his massive features, his face would have shown to the full as white as that of his Dandy Pard.

"You don't mean that, lad?" he muttered

hoarsely.

"There's the print of the shot-sack remaining. You can see how all the water had to run over. under, around, or through that mass of poison. And how thoroughly the devil's work was done. the carcass of old Mott, yonder, can testify."

Cold and steady came the sentences. Laughing Leo showed no signs of excitement in voice LAUGHING LEO sprung to the side of or manner. A stranger would have deemed him wholly uninterested in the matter; but Spread Eagle Sam understood his mate better than that. That white, silent rage was ten times more deadly than the wildest bluster-

> He could tell something of what Leo felt by the lava-flood that boiled over in his own veins. His great eyes, protruding still further from their sockets than usual, shot a glance toward the horse-trough, then back to the tell-tale imprints in the moist earth at their feet.

> "That was bad enough, but this-words cain't begin to tetch it!" he grated savagely, his huge hands closing and unclosing, working as though they felt the throat of the foul poisoner already in their grip. "It's bloody death when we ketch the hellion! An' we will ketch him! We've got to! You know the dirty critter, pard?"

Laughing Leo shook his head.

"But you kin make a pritty close guess?" per-

sisted Sam.

"It's a mighty wide field to choose from, old man," with a faint smile, as they passed down to the level again. "Run it over in your own mind, and see for yourself. A mighty wide field-bounded only by the horizon-embracing the whole neighborhood!"

The head of the ex-hide-hunter drooped at this

speech, for he felt its perfect truth.

Despite the profession which he had followedone, too, that in a great measure isolated him from the society of his fellow-men-Sam Ingalls was a lover of his race. Rude, rough, boisterous, ever ready for a fisticuff or a pitched battle with still more deadly weapons when nothing more harmless would serve, the herculean hidehunter was still better content when at peace with the whole world. He wanted to make others as happy and care-free as he would be himself. And as the years grew over his head, this old yearning for more and better society had kept him from following the scattering herds of buffalo still further from civilization. This yearning had made him all the more eager to join in with Leo Laughlin when this new departure was proposed.

The result had been a very bitter disappointment for him, after all the bright day-dreams of those earlier weeks, when his dearest wishes seemed on the point of being fully realized. It was through no fault of his that the breach between the new firm and those surrounding them had steadily grown and widened. He had met frowns with smiles, dark looks and sour words with laughing good-humor. He had smothered his naturally hot temper many and many a time, through his reluctance to abandon those

bright hopes.

But there is a limit to everything, and the time soon came when it was Laughing Leo who had to hold Spread Eagle Sam in checkwhen none other than the Dandy Pard, whom he had learned to love and respect, could have

averted bloodshed.

For an instant something of this hot anger flashed up in his eyes, as they encountered the coldly blazing orbs of his Dandy Pard. Only for a single breath, however. Sam was wiser than he had been in earlier years, and though he never yet had turned his back on an enemy no matter what the weight of odds against him, just now he felt the utter hopelessness of fighting the entire neighborhood.

"Leo, le's drap the hull durned thing!" he muttered, his tones strangely unsteady. "Le's pull out o' this durned kentry-le's go now, afore we turn into hogs like the rest o' the

gang!"

Leo smiled faintly, though he knew how hard it must have been for Sam Ingalls to force his lips into pronouncing such words as these.

"You forget the race for to-morrow, pardner. To run from that match would be even bitterer medicine than a dose of the infernal stuff that

laid out poor old Mott!"

Spread Eagle turned sharply away, his hands clinching until the bones and sinews audibly snapped. And something in his manner sent a cold shiver through the veins of his Dandy Pard.

Laughlin strode after, grasping the huge fellow by the arm and whirling him round until they stood face to face, with a power that seemed incredible when their contrasting bulk was borne in mind.

"Out with it, Sam Ingalls!" Laughlin remarked sharply, as their eyes fairly met. "What

news do you bring?"

"Blacker then I found waitin' me here," with a side glance toward the bloated carcass of the poisoned horse.

"Out with it, then!" with increasing sternness. "Am I a weak babe that you hum and

haw over a bit of fresh ill-luck?"

"They won't be no race to-morrow, pard," slowly uttered the other, with a convulsive gulping in his throat that rendered the words difficult to distinguish with certainty.

Laughing Leo shivered anew. His steel-like grip fell from the arm of his giant partner, and his blazing eyes sunk to the ground. For the moment he seemed totally unmanned; but this passed off as rapidly as it came on. A shake of his athletic figure; a proud, defiant toss of his head; and then his voice was even and steady as he said:

"The've played both ends against the middle, eh? One chance was not enough? They've

poisoned Tornado?"

"Wuss then that-they've locoed him!" Laughing Leo had nerved himself to hear that his idolized black racer was dead, poisoned as poor Mott had been slain; and had the expected words fallen from the lips of the giant, he felt that he could have listened without giving sign of the fierce grief that was tugging at his heartstrings. But this was wors -- and he staggered back, saved from falling only by the horse-trough against which he now leaned for support.

Stread Eagle Sam hissed forth an imprecation that almost scorched his lips. His pop-eyes were like halls of living fire. The veins stood out on his temples until it seemed as though they must burst from the hot blood that surged through

them so madly.

"Locoed! They wouldn't kill him outright! That wasn't enough to satisfy them! That would be enough to putt an eend to the race, an' not a word or a hint could be flung in your face! But it wouldn't do-they must crow an' flop thar wings over us both! Fer what'll they say? That we was skeered out, an' so drugged Tornado

ruther than go on with the match! Say-let 'em! An' let 'em swaller the answer I'll cram down tha'r dirty gullets-ef they kin!"

His rage fairly choked him, and forgetful of what had passed between them, Sam bent his head to take a draught from the horse-trough. Laughlin caught him and hurled him back, a strange smile on his face, his voice ominously. soft and even as he uttered:

"That's the shortest way out, I know, but I can't spare you yet, old pard! I'll need your good backing before the end, and-"

A sickly grin distorted the giant's face as he

interposed:

"A durned ole fool, ain't I? But I didn't think what I was doin'. I wanted to squinch the red-hot fire that's burnin' in my throat, but I reckon I'd ruther shet my trap an'smother it fer lack o' wind then to taste that devil's brothugh!" and he cast a shivering glance toward the bloated carcass of the dead buckskin.

Leo laughed hardly.

"Don't take the trouble to thank me, old fellow. It will come to about the same thing in the end, I reckon. We're fair men, but we'll hardly hold out until the whole neighborhood's used up. And that's about the size of the job that's before us, pard."

"We'll eat our bigness, anyway; an' when the circus is over, them that's left in workin' trim'll be better able to 'scribe our faces then our backs," grimly uttered the big rancher, his strong teeth clicking audibly, his pop-eyes glow-

Laughing Leo made no response, but strode over to where his poisoned horse lay, unfastening the tightly-drawn "cinch" preparatory to removing the silver-adorned saddle. In silence Spread Eagle Sam bore a hand, his mighty strength sufficing to lift the animal from the ground far enough for the equipage to be removed without cutting.

Laughlin wrapped the packages of poison up in the saddle-blanket for safer carriage, motioning his big pard to mount, handing him the

horse furniture and the poison. Sam hesitated, muttering:

"Better you ride, pard. You kin git thar heap sooner, an' mebbe you kin do more fer Tornado then—"

"A few minutes either way can make little difference," was the crisp response. "You're not a man to scare at a shadow. You know how the infernal weed works. If Tornado is locoed, the harm's all done."

"He's got it, sure—got it bad, too!" grated Ingalls, a savage snort making his thin nostrils

"Tell me what you know-I can listen while we travel."

Calmly, evenly came the words, but Sam knew how heavily this fresh blow from an unknown source had fallen upon his Dandy Pard.

Only one whose life has been passed for the greater part in the saddle can even begin to appreciate the intense love which one comes to feel for a good horse. To such a man, provided he is a man, not simply a brute with half the usual complement of legs, his horse becomes like a wife and children, so far as love and affection are concerned.

And Laughing Leo loved his black steed with all his naturally passionate nature. Only once had that love been cast in the shade by a stronger passion; and when that passion was frustrated. Tornado became still more precious in the eyes of his master, if possible.

It was this noble steed he had counted on carrying him to victory on the morrow; the only horse on the ranch which he knew stood any chance of defeating the pet racer of Basil

Brock's.

Knowing as he did that to win over the pet equine of that vast range would but increase the general dislike toward himself and partner, Laughing Leo had adroitly turned aside more stake proposed; he knew that Tornado, with anything like fair play, could "run all around" the light-limbed bay at the distance set by Basil Brock in his challenge. But he had turned down the too-dark pages of the past, and hoped to live a new and more regular life for the future. He was weary to death of the lawless course he had followed from early boyhood, and he hoped to keep clear of all that could possibly drive him backward.

For this reason had he borne with open slights, even with insults such as, in the past days, cauld only have been wiped out with hot lead or cold steel. It was a sort of penance imposed by himself, during the dark and bitter days that followed the tragic death of his mother, when his heart was softened by the pure and hopeless love which had, almost despite himself, entered into his life for a brief space.

But there is a limit to human endurance, and that limit Basil Brock had driven him across.

"I'd ruther bite my tongue off then to say it, but ef it's got to come-out with it!" grated Spread Eagle Sam as be put his horse to a brisk canter in order to avoid being left behind by the nimble-footed rancher, who ran smooth and level as though trained to the cinder path.

"Satan roast the hellion that putt the cussed

"You found it there? You know he has been

weed in the pore critter's manger!"

locoed, by something more than his symptoms, then?" asked Leo, turning his head but never breaking his stride to speak or to listen. It was a hard story to tell, as Spread Eagle

said, and it came from his lips in broken sentences, as though he had to use actual force in ejecting them. The facts can be put in much less space than would be required for a literal report.

He had parted from Laughing Leo at the place where the Mavericks were disposed of, after the round-up proper had come to an end. An errand to a neighbor had called him away before his partner was ready.

This errand performed, he hastened at once to their ranch, to be met by the house-servants -the cook and his boyish aid-whose excited cries and gestures warned him of past or coming trouble. How serious that was, he did not even suspect until he received the evidence of his own eyes, though they told him that Tornado was acting like a creature suddenly gone mad.

"Thank it was jes' his playful ways, ye see," the giant said, his tones husky and uncertain. "Never thunk sech a devil's deed was possible

in a Christian land!"

The moment he caught sight of the black racer in its roomy stall, the terrible truth burst upon him. This was no fit of fractiousness, born of confinement and restraint. The animal was raving mad. And with an insanity such as he had never seen save where the sufferer had eaten

freely of the "loco weed."

"He never knowed me, pard," and as he spoke Spread Eagle Sam had to try repeatedly before he could swallow the lump that rose in his honest throat. "He come at me like a fury, the froth flying from his teeth, his eyes popping from his head and looking blood-red as though crammed full o' fire! Like a flash it come onto me, then, an' fer a good bit they was too much wet in my ole eyes fer me to see jest what the pore critter was doin'. An' then—you know how it acts, pard. He fell in a heap, an' I knowed the time was come fer me to act!

"I went in his stall, an' thar, in the manger, I found what was left o' the cussed stuff! I didn't hev to look twicet afore I knowed it-

wuss luck!"

All this while Laughing Leo had been running along like some admirably disguised engine, and now, be stopped short as the ranch was sighted. Not for that, but to their ears on the favoring breeze of evening there came shrill, frenzied screams, mingling with dull thumping as though of iron-shod hoofs against heavy plank.

"He's still alive!" and Laughing Leo sprung ahead at a rate of speed that tested the limbs of

the good horse to keep pace with him.

"Don't be too brash, pard!" cried Spread Eagle, spurring his panting borse in the effort to pass before the white-faced rancher. "He's too mad fer to know ye—it'll be sart'in death ef you ventur' inside! Don't be too brash-fer my sake, ef not your own!"

That was perhaps the only appeal to which Laughing Leo would have listened in that critical moment. "For his sake!" The sake of the one being in all the wide world on whose love and fidelity he could safely rely! For his sake, he slackened his mad pace.

"It's done, an' nothin' we kin do'll alter it fer the better, lad," said Spread Eagle Sam, his voice husky and full of strong emotion as he sprung from the saddle and passed one arm about the waist of his partner—much as a lover might seek to soothe his grieving sweetheart.

The action was so unlike the rough, careless hide-hunter, that it strangely affected his partner. He knew that Spread Eagle Sam had respected him ever since that memorable day on the Buffalo Range, when the kid-gloved dandy than one pointed challenge, only to yield at | had read the hide-hunters such a stinging lesson last, when he was driven into a corner. Not in politeness. He knew that since their enterthat he doubted his powers of winning the great | ing into partnership, that respect had deepened into genuine affection; but this action showed a degree of love such as he had never dreamed the big man was capable of feeling for another

Leo slackened his pace to a walk, but his face was averted. There were tears in his blue eyes, and, man-like, he was ashamed to have then

seen, even by this true friend.

"You know how the cussed weed works, pard," huskily continued the big rancher, hardly knowing what words he uttered, only thinking to calm and steady his partner. "You know it drives the quietest hoss plum crazy mad. He won't know ye, nur recognize your voice. He'd dash at ye wuss then a tiger the minnit you show yourself. B'ar this in mind, an' stiddy down afore ye try to look in at the pore critter."

Not until they reached the fence which inclosed the stable where Tornado was confined. did Laughing Leo turn his face toward his partner. When he did, his hand gripped that of the big rancher with a grip that would have crushed a less compact bundle of bones and sinew.

His face was whiter than ever in the twilight, and there was a pinched look about his nostrils, deep lines around his lips, that told

how killing had been the struggle. But his voice was steady and firm as he uttered:

"I didn't think it was left in me, but you've brought it out, pard. I was a devil, back yonder. Now I'm a man-and I owe it to you!"

It was not often that Spread Eagle Sam felt at a loss for words to express his feelings, but this was one of those rare occasions. He gulped down that troublesome lump, but as often as he strove to speak, it rose up and choked him. His massive features were frightfully contorted, but there was an unusually soft light in his great eyes. And as the partners stood with tight clasped hands, each one felt that this dastardly outrage had brought them still closer together; that from this hour on they were more than brothers in love.

In silence they crossed the inclosure and opened the stable door, from beyond which still came those ear-splitting screams from the

locoed racer.

There was still ample light for the box-stall and its occupant to be clearly seen, though for a moment a dizzy blur came before the eyes of Laughing Leo as he heard the short, choking row mouth, her jetty brows arching in mock breathing of his beloved steed, between those horror. horrible screams.

fours, returning his look with a ghost of recog-

nition.

"The spell is workin' off-but don't be too resky, pard!" warningly muttered Spread Eagle Sam, with his lips close to the ear of his friend, knowing how the human voice, at times, will send a horse suffering as this one was, into renewed spasms.

If Laughing Leo heard, he gave no sign. He strode close to the heavily barred door, casting off his hat the more perfectly to reveal his features, his voice clear yet soothing:

"Tornado, old fellow! give us your hand-

Truly there is magic in the human voice! The poor horse pricked forward his ears, his trembling disappearing, a low affectionate whicker coming from his froth-tinged muzzle. And at the last words, it even lifted one fore-foot, blindly extending it as it had so often done when in health, to be shaken by its loved master.

A hopeful light came into the eyes of the young rancher. Surely the creature could not be so badly off, if it could recognize him so quickly—if it could recall the old commands

like this?

"The wu'st o' this spell is bout over, I reckon," muttered Ingalls as he read this hope in the eyes of his partner, but slowly shaking his head. "Fer the time, only. He's got it too mighty bad—wuss luck."

But Laughing Leo could not believe this, just then, and before his more cautious partner could lift a hand to hinder, he flung the bars open and stepped quickly inside, one hand

extended to accept the paw.

Too soon his eyes were opened to the truth. Tornado started back, shivering afresh, its eyes blazing up, its lips drawn back until the white teeth were revealed. Then-with a savage, maniacal scream, the black racer reared up before its master, the very personification of insane fury, springing forward and striking at Laughing Leo with its iron-shod hoofs.

CHAPTER V.

BLOODHOUND OR POODLE? A LOOK was certainly interchanged by father and daughter, but if it was one of apprehension, Finn McAvoy made a rapid recovery.

A perplexed expression came into his dark face, his beavy brows contracting, his thick lips

pursing as he shook his head slowly.

"Is it a wild b'aste ye'r' brandin' wid that outlandish name, sor? Sure there'd ought to be an in ire berd ov thim, be the awful len'th av itthe stretch av a thrail-rope betune the hid an'

the tail!" A look of doubt and perplexity chased the confident anticipation from the face of the stranger, and his steed backed away from that of the giant, just as its master would have recoiled had he been standing upon his own feet.

"Beg pardon, sir, but-I don't think-eh?" Queen Sate broke into a clear, ringing laugh, and the stranger turned toward her with a gasp of relief, the broad smile returning much as it had faded away as the woman spoke:

"Tnat's poor old dad's herd of buffaloes, to balance yours, dear sir!" her lustrous eyes dancing with a double share of mischief. "If he ever tries to rally you over this little adventure, just ask him if he ever knew-I'm not quite sure that I can pronounce the name myself, without hearing it once more! You said-"

"Melchoir Parkindale, ma'am, Masculine gender-singular person-remarkably singular, too! Hiding from a fortune, as though there was three parts of a miss tacked on to the end of

it! Mis-fortune: see?"

Finn McAvoy uttered a long whistle, arching his shaggy brows. "I wouldn't be sure it was hoidin', sor, av I

was in your shoes. Sure, the weight av that name is plinty enough for to sink a man over his hid out av soight iv he happened to sthraggle onto a soft spot in the soil—the saints sthick a hollow sthraw down to his miserable nostrils, to kape the brith av loife in his shmotherin' lungs whoile ye folly him up be the scent av his thrail, sor! Good luck be his!"

Queen Sate laughed merrily as the stranger cautiously edged a little closer to her side, placing her between himself and the giant rancher, whose broadened brogue seemed to give him an uneasy feeling of danger. And the lustrous eye that was nearest the stranger gave just the ghost of a wink, overflowing with roguishness, as she uttered in a theatrical aside:

"Whist, daddy dear! Will ye brush the hair from the teeth av ye, wid the front av yer back in the face av the sthranger, befure he has comprehinsion that it's Frinch we was whin we made the woorld wiser an' betther be comin' into it widout sthoppin' to-ow! wasn't it the turrible narrow iscale I made, jist!" and the merry witch clapped one gloved hand over her stirrup.

Finn McAvoy smiled grimly. The stranger There came a sudden silence, and dashing laughed feebly, uncertainly, like one who is not a hand across his eyes, Laughing Leo looked to quite positive he has fallen into the company of see Tornado, quivering in every muscle, a wild, persons entirely sane. Basil Brock frowned unnatural fire in his eyes, but standing on all- and bit his lips savagely, his insane jealousy finding food to feed its flames even in the meeting with this tenderfoot.

> "There is no such person as you mention in these parts, sir," he bluntly interposed, dettly sending his horse in between the ones ridden by his love and his present aversion. "You will have to look further for your Melchoir Parkin-

dale."

Queen Sate flashed a burning glance into his darkened face, and there was an impatient echo to her voice as she uttered:

"To the best of your knowledge, better add, Mr. Brock. 'As for me, somehow the name sounds familiar! Where have I heard it before?"

"Never mind the Melchoir, ma'am, if you can pin down the Parkindale half of it!" eagerly uttered the stranger, crowding Basil Brock until that gentleman's horse, with an irritated plunge, slipped out of the uncomfortable press. "Melchoir or heirs-girl, boy, woman, man! We'll take the sprouts if we can't get the original trunk! And precious glad of it, too! Yes, sirma'am, I intended—excuse me!"

Queen Sate turned a swift glance upon Finn McAvoy, and that gentleman instantly became what he was on most occasions, a frank appearing, correctly spoken, hospitable personage. With a native grace he lifted the broad-brimmed hat from his head, bowing to the stranger as he uttered:

"It is a sorry welcome you have received thus far, I'm afraid, my dear sir, but we will try our best to make amends. My ranch is yours, while you!favor this section, and any service we can render you is yours before you take the trouble of asking it. Little woman!"

"Yes, father," demurely murmured Queen Sate, looking meek as an angel as a touch of the spur brought her horse a little closer.

"Our guest, daughter," with a bow and motion of his bronzed hands. "Miss McAvoy,

The stranger was stretching out a hand to grasp that of the giant rancher, but he hastily withdrew it with the ceremony unperformed, fumbling in his bosom with eager haste, his eyes glowing and his lips pursed up with comical excitement. He brought forth a portly note-book, from which he extracted a glazed card bowing low as he handed it to the smiling, amused rancher.

"Most prominent firm in the city, sir! Business executed with neatness, precision and dispatch, sir! Do a land-office business, and-

"Sarah, permit me to commend this gentleman to your favorable consideration," said Finn McAvoy, with preternatural politeness, his face fairly owlish with gravity as he held the bit of pasteboard where the rays of the setting sun fell upon its face, adding: "Mr. Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale-Miss Sarah Anne McAvoy!"

"Most happy to-eh?" staring at the big rancher with astonished eyes, then breaking into a hearty laugh at what he considered a comical blunder, not on his own part, however. "That's good-extraordinarily good, I may say! If I only dare repeat it when I get back to the city; but I wouldn't, you know!" suddenly ceasing to laugh, his red face growing preternaturally grave as he added: "They mightn't like it, you know. Awfully respectable firm-top of the profession, and all that; but solemn-most depressingly solemn, I assure you!"

There was a puzzled look on the face of Queen Sate, and only those who knew her best would even have suspected her earnestness as she uttered the words:

"Do all who live in the city have to carry such terribly long names, Mr. Knifton Bragg

"Cicero Boggs, ma'am, confidential clerk to Messrs. Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale, of Minneapolis," with a low bow that was intended to hide the broad grin of amusement—a grin that almost brought a savage blow from the quivering stock-whip carried by Basil Brock.

Queen Sate snatched the card from the fingers of her father, an admirably counterfeited blush of mingled amusement and shame mantling her velvet cheeks as she glanced swiftly over the printed words. It was indeed the business card of a law firm, but low down in one corner and printed in red ink, she saw the name of Cicero Boggs.

"Never mention it, ma'am," eagerly added the lawyer's clerk, with a low bow and a smirk that wanted very much to be a laugh. "It's an honor for a man like me to be mistaken for the great and eminent firm of Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale, even for one short minute! This will ever be recalled as the proudest hour of my life, I assure you—ow!"

A start of his horse, against which Basil Brock had thrust an armed boot as he pressed up, caused Cicero Boggs to flinch and double up with pain as his foot was twisted in the

"Time is passing, Miss McAvoy, and the ranch is still some distance away," almost grufily muttered the jealous young rancher. "Shall we ride on, leaving your father to finish with this-gentleman?"

There was an ugly sneer on his lips as he uttered the title, after a brief pause that was, as he made it, almost insulting. And so Queen Sate appeared to regard it, for her figure was drawn rigidly erect, and her tones were almost icy cold as she responded:

"Don't let me detain you, Mr. Brock. I am not afraid of the twilight, and even if there was any danger to be apprehended, I could have nothing to fear with this gentleman and father to guard me."

"You mean that he is going with you?"

frowningly.

"Unless he prefers to accept your hospitality, sir," sharply interposed Finn McAvcy, with a dark frown and warning glance.

Cicero Boggs glanced rapidly from face to face, a faint smile stealing over his own as he said with a bow to Queen Sate:

"If I am not intruding, ma'am, why-" "You are my guest by right of prior discovery, Mr. Boggs," with a positive nod, that caused the worthy clerk to give a deep sigh of relief. "And as it is growing late—and I am growing awfully hungry-perhaps we had best

be traveling. Father?" "Wiser word was never spoken, if it does come from the lips of my own daughter," laughed the big rancher, wheeling his horse alongside that of Basil Brock, adding: "Will we see you in the morning, lad? I'll not ask ye to ride so far out of your way this late, after the day's work. For, of course, ye'll be wantin' a good look after the bonny bay horse that's to add to your herd the morrow, and put a few yellow boys into these same pockets into the bargain—d'ye mind, now?"

Basil Brock frowned darkly, with an ugly glarce toward the complacent face of the clerk, who was already chatting freely with Queen Sate. As though she felt the power of that look the Amazon turned her face toward him, nodding slightly as she cried:

"Good-night, Sir Knight of the Doleful Phiz! May the new day lend a more cheerful light to your face, or the bad omen will make me bet all my spare change on gallant Tornado—sure!"

Basil Brock flushed hotly as he bowed. He was too angry to trust his voice as he accepted his dismissal. And with spurs buried in its quivering flanks, his good horse bore him away at top speed.

"Rather, eh, peppery?" murmured Cicero Boggs, with a glance after the jealous rider. "Acts like something had bitten him!"

A vivid light leaped into the eyes of the lady, and Cicero Boggs might have taken warning Iv this, only for the swiftly vailing lids, and the unaccountable, to him, manner in which Queen Sate's horse seemed to take fright at nothing, bounding forward and prancing for several minutes.

There was but little conversation on the way to Emerald Ranch, and as that little bad no particular bearing on this story, it need not be recorded here.

Cicero Boggs was made heartily welcome, after the free-and-easy style of the section. He expressed his surprise at finding such a comfortable, almost elegant, residence in what be bad, until then, considered little less than a desert, beyond the confines of civilization. When once inside the building, he might have thought himself an inmate of a country residence near his beloved city.

After the supper, to which all did ample justice, the trio passed into an adjoining room, where Finn McAvoy produced liquor and cigars, the two men smoking while Queen Sate with her own fair hands, mixed a generous jerum of steaming hot punch. And she had her glass, too, sipping its contents as though she liked it, adding no little to the genuine comfort and pleasure of the hour.

But Cicero Boggs proved himself a true man of business, and though his bost seemed inclined to postpone all such matters for the present, he blandly insisted on introducing himself in proper form.

"The firm would never forgive me, sir, for putting pleasure before business," he said with sudden gravity, as he opened his capacious notebook and took from it sundry papers. "Business, though the heavens crack open and take a tumble! Their motto, sir! And, as their confidential clerk, I may add, my motto, too!"

The generous punch seemed to lend his naturally glib tongue increased volubility, and with amazing rapidity he explained the business which had brought him to that region.

Many long years before, an Englishman named Melchoir Parkindale had disappeared, leaving no clew behind by which he might be traced.

For many long years it appeared as though no person had any desire to or motive for tracing him. But then, through a death in far-away

England, that motive arose. "An e-nor-mous fortune, sir—and ma'am!" with a sudden after-thought, turning and ducking his close-cropped head toward Queen Sate, who seemed much more deeply impressed with the story than her father. "Nearly half a million pounds of English currency—two and a half million dollars! Reasons enough for finding the unfindable, sir! Reasons enough and motive enough-why, sir-and ma'am-with as e-nor-mous incentive for close searching and thorough sifting, I'd almost agree to bring back in perfect state a single drop of fresh water that had been cast into the very middle of the vast Atlantic Ocean! I-would-so!"

Cicero Boggs went on to detail how the case had been taken up by his firm, on speculation; how they had stumbled across what they had every reason to believe was a valuable

clew to the missing heir. "A hint that Melchoir Parkindale was to be found in this very section, my dear sir," nodded Cicero Boggs, with sparkling eyes and a fresh glass of punch half way to his lips. "And there's big money for any or all who helps the firm of Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale to success

in the undertaking-big money, sir!" But Finn McAvoy did not appear to take an overwhelming interest in the matter. Either his hard day's work, or the strong punch, or both combined, seemed to make him sleepy. And when the voluble clerk paused to let that assertion sink deep into the mind of his host, the giant rancher availed himself of the opportunity to slip away and pass out of the build-

Nothing daunted, Cicero Boggs turned to Queen Sate and devoted himself to her, since all else had failed. And Queen Sate seemed to the full as deeply interested in the case as he could wish, though she reluctantly admitted that, to the best of her belief, she had never even heard the name of Melchoir Parkindale uttered before it passed his own lips that even-

ing. Still, that don't count," she said, with a smile so charming that Cicero did not even recognize the bit of slang. "In this section, there is many a man who prefers to travel under a name other than the one he received from his parents-for

reasons!" The lawyer's clerk gave a little start, and cast a quick glance over his shoulder, his manner growing just a trifle more subdued, as though this observation had awakened a lulled apprehension. And though a little laugh accompanied the words, there was something like a tremor in the query which next passed his lips.

"I suppose there's nothing in the terrible tales told in the city about the many criminals running around unmuzzled in these parts?" Queen Sate laughed softly, one white hand

stealing across the table and gently tapping the clerk on an arm as she whispered:

"Did you notice how peculiarly the young gentleman who was with us this evening acted toward you, my dear sir?"

"It was peculiar, then?" asked Boggs, with a faint smile. "Do you know, Miss McAvoy, I fancied that was his natural manner!"

"Natural enough, after all," with a repetition of that soft laugh. "Natural enough, since he suspected you of being a detective in disguise!" There was a laugh on her lips, a smile on her

face, but there was neither the one nor the other in her great eyes as they fastened upon his face with strange intentness, seeking to read the truth of her own strong suspicions before her opposite could perfect his mask-if, indeed, he was wearing one at all.

She saw only a perplexed doubt. Cicero Boggs looked the picture of amazement. Certainly he showed neither fear nor mortification, as he might were he what she more than suspec-

ted. "Is it a joke, ma'am?" he finally ventured, forcing a smile as though duty bound to show

his appreciation in such a case. "To us, of course, since we know just who and what you are," was the response, with sudden and portentous gravity "A jest to us, provided father can convince Basil Brock of your innocence before that young hot-head makes a decisive move."

"Eh? You mean—you don't mean—" "That father has gone to see Basil Brock, or to send him word that you are not the blood-

hound of the law he suspects. May he be successful-may heaven forbid the tragedy I fear!" with a shiver and a nervous glance around them. "If Basil Brock should come before receiving that assurance—well, we'll hope not!"

"Decidedly-hope not!" muttered Cicero Boggs, with a ghastly smile on his face as he hitched his chair a little nearer his fair hostess. "But it's all a joke--you said it was a jest, I believe?"

Queen Sate heaved a sigh, and the pitying look in her glorious eyes brought the clerk yet a little nearer her side.

Cicero forced a laugh with no little effort, as

he said: "A good joke—a most admirable jest! And yet-don't you think, Miss McAvoy, that it is a little-just a leetle hard on the young gentleman?"

"Which, being interpreted, means?" "Why, if he is so bitter against a detective, he must have done something to give birth to

that fear, don't you see? And so-eh?" "He killed a man-or was it two?" with a musing look at vacancy that lasted a moment, then gave way to a languid indifference. "1 really forget, but it doesn't matter; he or they were detectives."

"He! he!" faintly giggled Boggs, furtively brushing his brow as though the room had suddenly grown uncomfortably warm, though a perceptible shiver ran over his frame at the same moment. "Another jest! You are soso facetious, dear ma'am! I never enjoyed myself more in all my-what was that?" giving a start, and looking as though strongly inclined to duck under the table.

"Really, I did not catch the sound. Was it anything like a shot? If so, father may have met Mr. Brock," and Queen Sate lifted a white hand to hide a languid yawn.

Cicero Boggs did not make even a pretense at laughing, now. His blue eyes were wildly protruding, his face changed color, and his hand trembled so that the glass he sought to refill clicked sharply against the edge of the punch bowl.

Queen Sate opened her eyes widely, an amused surprise filling them as she gazed keenly into his face. And there was an echo of wonder in her voice as she exclaimed:

"Is it possible? Surely you are not alarmed, Mr. Boggs?"

"Well, not just that," with a feeble effort toward a smile. "But it sounded so strange, coming from your fair lips, that-"

"About those detectives?" with a curling lip, as she deftly refilled his glass. "When you have lived in these parts a few years, Mr. Boggs, such trifles will have no more effect upon your nerves than they do on mine. There's scarcely a week passes without something of the sort happening."

"You mean—surely, ma'am, I haven't caught

your meaning?" "My fault, of course," was the polite response. "I keep forgetting that you are a stranger to our little peculiarities. Listen, and I'll try to make my meaning more clear:

"I told you that it was quite an ordinary thing for men to drop their real names when they come here. To be painfully blunt, they take other names so that their past deeds may not be so readily traced up to their last place of residence. The law knows this, and when a man is wanted particularly, the law sends its hounds up in this quarter, knowing that the scent may most likely be struck with the least delay.

"Well, a detective is of little use, as such, if he is a fool. If he is no fool, he knows that in making such a venture he is taking his life in his own hands, ready for the one who may prove his superior in smartness, or with the pistol. And so-well, once in a while he takes his game back with him, but oftener he stops right where he found or was found by his man." "In other words, he is murdered!" with a

shiver. "We don't call it by such a harsh name,"

frowning. "And—surely Mr. Brock didn't take me for a

detective?" "Such was my fancy, at the time, though I may have been mistaken. Possibly he was simply jealous because you looked at me," was the placid response, as Queen Sate daintily sipped her punch. "He is rather inclined to

be jealous, at odd spells." "Good heavens, ma'am!" excitedly ejaculated Cicero, almost leaping from his chair as he vigorously pushed it clear around to the opposite side of the table. "And I'm a married man! With a wife! With five innocent babes that

call me papa! With-with-" "That may make some difference, sure enough," nodded Queen Sate, reflectively. "Pity you didn't bring your family with you. But I'll tell Mr. Brock in the morning, if I don't forget it. Please remind me should it slip my

mind, won't you, dear sir?" "I don't-don't think I'll be here," stammered poor Boggs, his eyes glassy as those of a fish. "I don't believe our client is to be discovered in these parts. I'm losing faith in that supposed clew-losing it with marvelous rapidi- say what he was otherwise incapable of.

ty, ma'am! I reckon I'd save time by making an early start in the morning-or this very night! Why not?"

"I think I'd advise the use of daylight, Mr. Boggs," with chilling dryness. "Traveling by night is mighty unhealthy for strangers in this section. And then, the gathering to-morrow for the race. Everybody will be there, and you could learn for certainty whether or no your Melchoir Parkindale is to be found here."

Cicero Boggs groaned beneath his breath, looking the very picture of uneasy apprehension. But he gave a sudden start as a low, mocking laugh parted the red lips of his fair hostess, and his color changed in spite of himself as he looked up to see her leaning across the table, her great eyes keenly reading his countenance, a smile that was almost a sneer curling her lips as she uttered:

"You play the part to perfection, my dear sir, but don't you think it is time to drop the mask, now I have taken a square look beneath

"I don't-

"Bah!" sinking back in her chair with a short, hard laugh of contempt. "Your name is not Cicero Boggs. You are no lawyer's clerk. You never expected or wished to find a man by the name of Melchoir Parkindale. You are a detective; who are you trailing?"

"Is it another joke?" with a faint grin. "You'll find it a terribly grim jest, or I'm way off my base! I knew you were other than you wished to appear at the first fair look. I have keen eyes, but there are many another pair in this neighborhood equally as sharp. What I have discovered, others will discover. What I have recalled, others may recall—for we are not all fixtures here, bear in mind. Sometimes we leave the range for a ramble through civilization, and when there we use our eyes"

Cicero Boggs listened to this rapid speech with open lips and eyes that threatened to pop from their sockets. As Queen Sate ceased speaking, his jaws closed with an audible click, then reopened to say:

"Then I've got lost on the way! Then somebody changed me while I slept! For when I left Minn-"

"Chicago, you mean!" "Chi-eh?" gasped the fellow, oewilderedly. "Your name is Wirt Dalton," uttered Queen Sate, leaning forward and emphasizing each sentence by a tap on his arm. "You are a pet detective in the employ of the Pinkerton Agency. You have come here as a bloodhound to track down some criminal, or what you call a criminal. Mind that you do not feel the fangs at your own throat first!"

"But I tell you, ma'am, I'm simply Cicero

Boggs, the confi-" "Have it so, if you prefer," interposed Queen Sate, sinking back in her chair, once more languid and indifferent. "I was speaking solely for your own good, and if you don't care enough for your life to accept a friendly warning, the consequences rest on your own head-my conscience is clear!

"Pray have a little more punch, Mr. Boggs?" with a winning smile, as she took up the silver ladle and dipped it deep into the bowl.

TWO OF A KIND.

In anything but an agreeable humor Basil Brock spurred rapidly away from the trio, his brows gathered in a dark, suspicious scowl, his brown eyes glowing redly with the hot passion behind them.

And yet, had the question been put to him, he could hardly have told at what this rage or suspicion was directed. For, whatever else he might have thought of this clumsy tenderfoot, he most assuredly never for an instant classed him with those hounds of the law, as Queen Sate had so strongly hinted.

It was enough for him to know that this smirking, flashily dressed fellow from the city was basking in the smiles of the woman whom he loved so passionately. That he was riding by her side, gazing into her glorious eyes, listening to her musical tones, and of course even at this early stage of the game beginning to fall captive to those united charms.

"She'll fool him on to the top of his bent! She'll make him think that his foot is fairly on the threshold of paradise, before she slams the

gate in his grinning face!" Even in his mad jealousy Basil Brock did not go further than that. Queen Sate might flirt with the fellow, just as she would flirt with a blind and crippled centenarian for lack of better material; but beyond flirting she would not go. He knew this as firmly as he knew that the red sun was just then sinking out of sight beyond the western horizon, yet the bare idea of the woman he wished all for his own even flirting with another sent his hot blood madly through his veins.

Basil Brock was one of those unfortunate beings given completely over to the dread demon of jealousy. At the slightest provocation this demon would awaken, and while under its bandful influence, the young rancher would do and

It was this insane jealousy that led to much, if not all, of the annoyance and trouble that had overtaken the firm of Laughlin & Ingalls.

Until Queen Sate had begun to smile too frequently upon the younger and handsomer member of that firm, all had gone well enough with them. So many long miles intervened between the two ranches—the "Triangle" and the "B. B." as known from the respective brands—that for some little time Basil Brock was in ignorance of the frequent meetings between Laughing Leo and Queen Sate. And this ignorance was increased by an enforced absence from the range for some time through important business.

It was not long after his return, however, before his too-ready suspicions were awakened. His love was so earnest after its kind, that he had never made the slightest pretense at disguising it from the public eye, and there were enough to carry him malicious tales of what had been going on during his absence.

Never mind the minor details! Enough that Basil Brock from that day on never let an opportunity pass him unimproved. He had openly sought a quarrel with Laughing Leo, but thanks to the new course in life which he had marked out. Laughlin declined to meet him half-way.

With a forbearance which fairly paralyzed Spread Eagle Sam, Leo quietly ignored the sneers, hints, and even insults, and as soon as he divined the prime cause of all this, he almost entirely dropped the acquaintance with the Emerald Ranch, although he had begun to find it very agreeable.

Not that he was in love, or in any danger of becoming so. Amusing enough he found Queen Sate—something like a bumper of champagne to an unseasoned throat—sharp and stinging, with a peculiar sweetness mingling with the rest, but leaving a taste that was unwholesome.

Ever after parting with her his thoughts would revert to Luada Kirkendall as he had known her last; and Queen Sate was ever the sufferer. And when Spread Eagle Sam ventured to clumsily joke him on the subject, Laughing Leo would shake his head negatively.

"Not if she was ten times as handsome, and a thousand times as rich in prospective, pard. She's good company, and all that, but when I want a woman, I want a woman all over."

Scarcely as polished an expression as it might have been, perhaps, but Spread Eagle Sam quickly caught his meaning, and that was the main point.

Now, Basil Brock was an ugly enemy for new beginners in that section to have. He was rich, and one of the largest feeders in those parts. He was liked well enough, despite his hot temper, by the majority of the ranchers; and the few who might have had "sneaking notions" of Queen Sate themselves, seemed overawed by his greater pretensions.

Finn McAvoy was an open advocate of his claims, and it had come to be pretty generally understood that an engagement existed between the young couple which would, in due time, end in a grand jollification for them all.

That this had not transpired long before now, was through no lack of persuasion on the part of Basil Brock. Time and time again had he put his fate to the test, only to be foiled by the quick-witted, nimble-tongued Belle of the Range, just as on this evening.

The truth was that Queen Sate had taken a strong fancy to the young member of the new firm. That she was, if not actually in love with Laughing Leo, at least willing he should be another of her many captives. She spared no pains to bring this about, and though Laughing Leo never visited the Emerald Ranch of late, or threw himself in her way, she managed to meet him frequently enough to prevent his forgetting her beauty—far too often for the serenity of Basil Brock, though he did not know of half those "chance" encounters.

Queen Sate needed but precious little encouragement to change from fancy to love, deep and ardent. And had Laughing Leo acted with less scrupulous reserve of late, if he had given her but half a chance to yield without actually flinging herself at his head—"Basil Brock might go hang!" as the very plain-spoken young lady privately expressed herself.

Better for the new firm, perhaps, had Queen Sate been a trifle less ready with her tongue. She let Basil Brock learn something of her growing sentiment in favor of Laughing Leo, and from that hour his course was laid out. If

Laughing Leo would not fight, he should run.

"Fight, run or ruin!" came through his grating teeth as he sped on toward the B. B. Ranch.

"I'd prefer the first, but the fellow has turned to a veritable cur since he left the road for the range. I'd think those old tales all lies, if there was even the ghost of a chance for an error to have slipped in—but there is not! I took pains to make everything certain before passing on. He is the man—and he's my meat!"

There was more than jealousy of woman in those hissing accents, and in that fierce, deadly scowl. It was not only because of Queen Sate that Basil Brock hated Laughing Leo.

"The cur vows he's come to stay, so it won't

be run. That leaves ruin, and I'll take a right smart bite out of the Triangle on the morrow—if that infernal red-skin has done his work as well as he promised! If not—talk of the devil!" sharply reining in his horse just in time to keep from riding down a dark figure that suddenly sprung out from behind a clump of weeds, under which it seemed impossible for a human being to have lain concealed.

"Red-foot!"

"Red-foot is here-master."

There was a slight pause before the title was given, as though it came less easily than the other words, and there was a peculiar movement of the bare head that came near being a toss. Indian though this slender being might be, he did not lack for pride, it seemed.

"And with some clumsy excuse for failure, I'm betting odds!" viciously snapped the young rancher, bending over in the saddle, the better to read the tidings contained in that dusky face.

"You would lose, master," was the quiet re-

"What!" with savage intensity. "You have done the job? Dare to lie to me, you red rascal, and I'll take the hide off your back by inches with my whip!"

"Strike once—never strike again, master!" ejaculated Red-foot, leaping back with the lightness of a panther, a gleaming knife appearing in his hand, balanced by the point between thumb and finger, ready for the death-flight at an instant's warning.

Basil Brock had let one hand drop to the polished handle of his stock-whip as he uttered that fierce threat, but it was a purely mechanical motion. He never thought of carrying out that threat, for he knew well enough that this fellow would not dare attempt to utter a lie to his face on such an important subject. It was simply his way; he should have been born a Russian autocrat.

A short, fierce laugh came through his white teeth as he lifted his empty hand with a gesture of placation. There was a smile upon his flushed face that told he was not angry. This unexpected spirit in one whom, until then, he had looked upon as little better than a dog, since he was gifted with the power of speech, really pleased him. His tool was more valuable than he had given him credit for being.

"Put up your knife, Red-foot," he said, with an approving echo in his tones. "I was only

testing your nerve."

"If I lacked nerve, would I have taken this job?" coldly uttered the red-skin, his gleaming weapon vanishing somewhere about his person. "Would I have risked being caught by the man who laughs as he kills, or the big buftimes rather than to find his

"Or have returned to tell me of your failure—and that would be a still more daring deed, Redfoot!" laughed Basil Brock, showing his teeth as he sprung to the ground, leaving his horse to follow at will as he moved onward, accompanied by the slender red-skin.

Red-foot made no response to this addition, but strode on in silence through the deepening twilight. His bronzed features showed no signs of emotion as Basil Brock scanned them keenly, intently. And more than ever the young rancher realized that he had underestimated this tool of his, vagabond and worthless loafer as he had until now considered him.

For the first time he caught himself beginning to wonder who and what this red-skin really was. Never until then had he thought of bim as a man, content to use the convenient tool which he found ready for his service.

And, somehow, Red-foot appeared to have undergone a change, strange and complete. He no longer looked or talked like the idle, degraded, worthless vagabond of recent days. His slouching, lazy shuffle was gone, and he walked erect, his footsteps springy, his lithe form full of grace, despite the rags that alone covered his nakedness. Even his voice and manner of speaking had changed for the better. His sentences were sharp and distinct, without the drawling accent which had—if he remembered aright—marked them before.

and he can go he out making a non He sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the control of the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the control of the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the control of the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the control of the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the sees more than forgets. What he keeps until the juing the sees more than forgets. What he sees more than forgets and the can go he out making a non the sees more than forgets. What he sees more than forgets.

Really, if his eyes had not told him better, he could have thought his companion a white

"And you've done the job, Red-foot?" he asked, breaking the brief silence.

"Red-foot promised. What he says, he does," was the terse response.

"And the black racer is dead? You tell me

that?"

Basil Brock paused as the red-skin made an abrupt gesture with one hand. A dark frown shot into his face, and his teeth clicked sharply with angry suspicion; but he waited for the red-skin to explain.

"It's what you've done that I'm most interested in. Out with it in a word, curse you!" grated the hot-tempered rancher, making a grasp at the red-skin, to be evaded by a swift movement.

Red-foot confronted him, one hand resting on the haft of his knife, repeating slowly: "What was it the master said to Red-foot?"

Basil Brock smothered a savage curse as best

he could, and though he could scarcely refrain from leaping at the throat of his stubborn emissary, he managed to utter:

"I hired you to kill that black horse of Leo Laughlin's."

Red-foot shook his bare head vigorously, the ghost of a smile curling his thin lips.

"Wrong, master! It was not kill."

Basil Brock grew cold and steady, with alarming suddenness. If Red-foot only knew it,

he was playing with his own life.

"Never mind the precise words I used. My meaning was clear enough for even you to understand what I wanted, what I was willing to pay for. In one word—did you kill that

black devil?"
"Not kill—better than kill, master," with a

The young rancher frowned blackly. He knew what a marvel Tornado was, and he could feel assured of full success only when he knew that death had claimed the racer.

"Tell me just what you have done, and tell it quick, Red-foot," he uttered, with dangerous quietness. "I want to know just how much I owe you. I'm in a hurry to pay you off."

There was a hidden meaning in the words, but the red-skin did not seem to perceive it. Or, it may be, he felt able to guard himself.

A complete change came over him. He

laughed lightly, casting to one side his assumed dignity. And more than ever like a white man were his words and manner of speaking.

"All right. I've had my turn, just as you had yours at first. You treated me like a cur: I have treated you as one man treats another, his equal in all save color of skin. Now to business:

"You hired me to doctor the black horse, over yonder. I agreed to do your work for your pay. I have done it, and—"

He is dead, then?" interposed Brock, breathlessly.

"He is not dead, but he might better be. He is crazy—locoed!"

Basil Brock ground an angry curse between his teeth.

"That is not enough, curse you for an idiot! That horse is a very demon, I tell you! And his master—double devil that he is!—will cure or make his horse forget your weeds! If there's a spark of life in the demon, he'll make him win against all odds!"

"Did you ever see a horse go mad from eating the rattling weed, master?" coolly asked the red-skin.

"I've heard of them often enough, and I know-"

"That the laughing man would a thousand times rather see his good runner stone dead than to find him as he has, before this," rapidly interposed the red-skin. "That he has all the loss, without even a drop of comfort. If his horse was dead, he could point to the carcass and say 'Look! it is not my fault that the race is

Basil Brock laughed, hardly, triumphantly.
"That wouldn't save his five hundred head.
I took care to make the race play or pay!"
"Then it is only the horns and heafs the

"Then it is only the horns and hoofs the master cares for?"

Basil Brock gave a start at the peculiar manner in which Red-foot put this query. Like a flash it came to him what was meant, and a hot flush accompanied the red light that leaped into his eyes.

The Indian laughed softly, then added

rapidly:

"Red-foot is only a poor, ignorant Indian, but he has eyes and a brain. His foot is soft, and he can go here, there, everywhere, without making a noise to call eyes toward him. He sees more than his face shows, and he never forgets. What his ears takes in, his brain keeps until the juice is all sucked out. What—"

"What has all this got to do with it?" growled Brock, surlily.
"Keep cool and perhaps you'll see," laughed Red-foot, with another rapid change of man-

Red-foot, with another rapid change of manner. "I just wanted to show you how I came to read more in your face than I heard from your lips.

"If I had stolen in and cut the throat, or sent my knife to the heart of the black horse, you would have been satisfied, for the time; for then you could not have lost your big bet. But I looked further than that. I saw—listen, master!

"The black racer will die, for I waited long enough to see him eat freely of the rattle-weed. But he will not die to-morrow, nor next day. He will not be dead for the laughing man to show when the time for the big race comes. He will be sick—maybe crazy with one of the fits—but what of that? When the laughing man says look! the master can laugh and ask what drug

At last Basil Brock fully realized what the red-skin was driving at, and a laugh of malicious triumph hissed through his teeth. Let the black racer win, if he could! It was not the amount at stake he cared for, great as that certainly was. If the black horse showed signs of the "rattle-weed," that was enough. A chance to charge Laughing Leo before the gathered crowd—before Queen Sate herself!—with dis-

counting a defeat by drugging his champion, would be worth double the wager!

In his vindictive joy he thumped Red-foot on the back with a vigor that caused the Indian to flinch.

"You're right, Red-foot! That's worth ten times the stake, even if I should lose it tomorrow!"

"Won't lose-win bet and have laugh, both," confidently nodded his unscrupulous tool, grinning broadly. "That worth money, eh?"

"I'll double the sum, and thank you into the bargain!" laughed the young rancher as he whistled up his horse and leaped into the saddle. "What! don't that satisfy you, you cormorant?" with arching brows as he saw Red-foot slowly shake his head.

"Money good-heap good!" grunted Redfoot, lapsing into the traditional manner of his

race. "Then what's the matter with you? What are you looking so confounded grumpy about? you agreed to do the work for so many dollars, and of my own accord I've offered to double that amount. That's enough to satisfy any hog!"

"Red-foot no hog," shortly uttered the redskin, drawing his torn and greasy blanket about his shoulders. "Red-foot want squaw!"

Basil Brock stared at the fellow in open-eyed amazement.

"Want a squaw? Well, what I've got to do with that? Think I keep a red-skinned harem?"

"Don't know what harem: don't want harem:

want squaw!" Basil Brock broke into an impatient laugh,

then uttered sharply: "That's enough nonsense, old fellow. You can talk white talk when you feel in the humor, and I don't know of a better time for showing your skill in that direction than right now and here. Tell me what you want, in terms that I can understand, and then I will answer you."

Red-foot laughed softly. Apparently he was a bit of a wag, after his own peculiar fashion, and enjoyed puzzling this master of his, who was a little too apt to treat him with less consideration than he, Red-foot, fancied he de-:served.

"All right, sir, if you like it better that way. The money is all right, and I'll not throw it over

my shoulder, but-" "Look here, Red-foot," interposed Brock, curiosity overpowering him now that his greatest interest was satisfied. "You're something more than the Indian loafer and vagabond people in

these parts think you. Where did you learn to talk so like a white man?" "Talk Injun fashion if like dat better. Want squaw! Mus' hab squaw. Injun no good 'out squaw. Squaw cook-Injun eat. Dat right

way. Eatin' good-cookin' dam hard work!" Despite his chagrin Basil Brock was forced to laugh at this complete transformation. Not only in words, but in tones, in manner, Red-foot was now the genuine vagabond he had always thought him until this evening.

"I've nothing more to say, old fellow. Keep your secret if it suits you best. You've done the work I set you, and that is all I care

about." "All right it is, sir," promptly returned Redfoot of the white tongue. "As I started to say, I'll not refuse your doubled pay, but if you could hold back a portion of it and give me the value in something else, I'd be suited much better."

"A squaw, do you mean?" with a laugh. Red-foot shrugged his shoulders grimly. "I'm an Indian, as you know, but I'd rather take a squaw from almost any other pair of hands, sir!"

"What am I to infer from that?" sharply. "That if my skin is red, it is not that of a dog," was the cool retort. "That if I am an Indian in color, I am a white man at heart. And like other white men, I prefer to do my own court-

ing."
That's lucky, since you'll not be so apt to call on me to spark some dusky princess for you!" with a hard laugh. "Still I'm left in the dark. What is it you want? Curse you-speak out

plainly!" The sun had disappeared for some little time, but the full moon was just showing itself above the horizon. With a quick motion Red-foot turned so as to display his rags and tatters by

this silvery light, adding in words: "Is this the rig to go courting in, master?" "Hardly," laughed the young rancher. "But the money I'll give you will be enough to rig

you out like a prince, Red-foot!" "If there was a place to buy and sell close at hand-yes. But it is too far away-it takes too much time going and coming. The squaw mebbe not wait so long-mebbe hitch up some other Injun!"

Basil Brooke glanced keenly over the figure of the Indian, mentally comparing it with his own by no means robust form. Red-foot was slender, but well-built, and there was not so much difference there. Their hight was nearly the same. And, after all, he was an Indian. He would hardly complain if the fit of his coveted "courting dress" was a little loose!

"Come on to the ranch with me, Red-foot, and

I'll see what I can do for you," was his decision, as he again set his horse in motion. "I believe I've got just the thing to catch your eye, or the eye of your red princess, for that matter, if she likes color and glitter."

"Dat good!" grunted Red-foot, keeping pace with the horse. "Squaw like bright color. Come down dam quick when Red-foot show off all

bright like turkey gobbler!"

"I'll do my level best to make your strut a perfect success, old fellow, if only to be sure of your services when I may chance to need them again," laughed the young rancher.

And then, as they pressed on, he questioned the Indian as to how he managed to secure an entrance to the stable where the black racer was confined.

Red-foot, now that his dearest hopes were about to be realized, let his tongue wag freely, and though not much more time was consumed in reaching the ranch, his story was fully told and understood.

Basil Brock was in high glee as he entered the ranch, with Red-foot close at his heels. He bet- o' the rattle-weed even!" he inwardly muttered, terunderstood the peculiar working of the famed | as his free hand mechanically sought out the loco weed, now, and considered his wager as good as won, while he would have a doubly sweet revenge on his rival by hinting at selfdrugging to discount a defeat.

Red-foot seemed in equal good humor, despite his color. And when Basil Brock brought out a discarded suit of clothes, all color and glitter, with gold lace and bright metal buttons, his pleasure broke out after a fashion white rather than red.

The suit was fashioned after the Mexican style, and nothing was lacking to complete it. It was but little worn, for Basil Brock had soon discarded it after seeing how plainly his fellow ranchers dressed, and how "monkeyfied" it made him appear beside them, as Queen Sate herself had declared with proudly curling lips.

Red-foot showed some signs of wanting to try the rig on, then and there, but Basil persuaded him out of the notion. He even went so far as to hint at the propriety of a bath as a preliminary, and Red-foot was content to laugh at the insinuation instead of getting angry.

With the gay suit carefully wrapped up, and with his hire safely stowed away about his person, the red-skin took his departure, leaving his employer to his own thoughts.

Maliciously pleasant enough were they! "I wouldn't begrudge half my herds for tomorrow's sport!" he declared, with a hard, cruel laugh, as he saw in fancy the double defeat of the man he hated so intensely. "And she'll be there to see and hear! That's the cream of the whole affair! Queen Sate—my queen!"

CHAPTER VII.

"NO KNIFE CAN CUT OUR LOVE IN TWO!" So swift and unexpected was this attack that Laughing Leo would surely have gone down to death before those flashing hoofs, only for the strong hands of Spread Eagle Sam.

Far better than his Dandy Pard did the huge rancher understand the peculiar workings of the "rattle-weed," and though Laughing Leo paid no attention to his hasty remonstrance against venturing into the inclosure with the poisoned racer, Spread Eagle followed close in his tracks, a hand outstretched even before Tornado shrunk shivering from the master he had idolized in life. And picking his Dandy Pard up in his mighty arms as though his weight was no more than that of an infant, Spread Eagle Sam sprung through the barred door, actually feeling those steel-shod hoofs brush the garments covering his back as they came viciously down.

He flung Laughing Leo away from him the instant that leap was taken, turning with wonderful celerity to close and secure the barrier. Not an instant too soon.

Screaming frightfully, the locoed racer struck at the heavy bars with his hoofs, denting the hard wood deeply. He tore at them with his gleaming teeth, tearing out splinters marked with blood. He reared up and plunged forward with his entire weight, causing the strong structure to shake and quiver as though on the point of giving way.

Even Spread Eagle Sam gave a slight shudder as he saw and heard. What then must it have been to Laughing Leo, whose love for the black steed was so all-absorbing?

Bitter as death! Leaning against the side of the building where he had brought up when his giant pard flung him out of danger, Laughing Leo watched the frantic, blind fury of his beloved horse. His face was pale as that of a corpse, and he shuddered at brief intervals; but neither of these

symptons were born of personal fear. It may be doubted whether he really comprehended the extent of the peril from which the ready wit and strong hands of his partner had saved him. For the time being he had thoughts only for the tortured animal. He shivered when he saw the red blood tinging the froth of insanity. He turned still paler as he saw the abraded skin and great bruises swelling up as Tornado again and again hurled himself

against the unvielding barrier. Spread Eagle Sam satisfied himself that the 'know that, lad?"

fastenings were secure, then stepped back to the side of his Dandy Pard, intense sympathy written in his honest face and glowing in his big eyes. There was a strange gentleness, almost timidity, in his manner, that contrasted strongly with his huge bulk and rough exterior. And as his great right hand closed over that of his Dandy Pard, his touch was soft and gentle as that of a loving maiden.

"It's hard-monstrous bard, lad," he muttered, his voice husky and far from steady as he vainly sought a word of consolation.

Laughlin glanced into his sympathetic face, but only for an instant. Then his bloodshot eyes reverted to the locoed racer, following its every movement as though fascinated.

Spread Eagle Sam saw this, and his face grew still more troubled. Deep down in his heart he regretted that he had not left Tornado dead in his stall before carrying the tidings to his Dandy Pard. That would have been a terrible blow, but not equal to this.

"It'll drive him crazy-mad-wuss then a dose butt of a revolver.

Was it instinct that carried the eyes of Leo Laughlin after that hand? Surely he had made no sound, no motion sufficient to break that painfully intent gaze; yet there came a sharp, stern warning:

"Don't you do it, old man! Kill me first!" "It'd be a marcy to him, an' a double marcy to you, pard!" muttered the ex-hide-hunter, but removing his hand from the weapon. "You kin see fer yourself that the pore critter hes got his dose. You kin see fer yourself that he's better dead then livin' to suffer as he is sufferin' now. Hell's hottest fire on the head o' the imp as chucked the rattle-weed in his manger!"

Laughing Leo shivered anew as Tornado, still screaming, still panting and gasping in agony such as words are powerless to express, hurled his mighty bulk once more against the barrier, beating it with his plates, tearing it with his teeth, sending bloody splinters flying.

"You could kill him—you could send a bullet through his brain!" he muttered, like one scarce conscious of his own speech. "And you used to pet him—used to say you loved him!"

"That's the very why, lad. It'd come hard, but not so hard as to stan' idle here an' watch the pore critter suffer heap wuss then death by knife or bullet. So it'd be 'mighty hard ef it was a brother-ef it was you, pard, I saw sufferin' the same way. But ef I knowed that they wasn't any other cure than death-ef I knowed you'd hev to suffer with spells like that as long as the breath o' life was in you-I'd find the narve to send you peace an' rest, even ef in doin' it I hed to kiver my soul with murder!"

There were tears in the great blue eyes as he spoke, and tears in the voice that grew busky

and indistinct in his throat. Even in the depth of his trouble, Laughing Leo seemed to feel, as he had never before realized, the great love which his giant partner entertained for him. His cold fingers closed tightly about that muscular hand—the hand that had so recently saved him from being crushed to death beneath the hoofs of the steed he was mourning. But his bloodshot eyes never wavered from the black racer. And a painful gasp came from his lungs as he felt that all was over.

Tornado reeled back from the hoof and teethscarred barrier, an almost human groan of agony coming from his fluttering lungs. His trembling legs spread out wider in the effort to uphold the weight of his body. A brief swaying from side to side—then the locoed racer sunk down in a shivering, helpless heap on its litter.

"You've got your wish-Tornado is dead!" A flush of pain came into the bronzed face of the ex-hide-hunter at this bitter outburst, but he gave no other sign. He knew that his partner was more than half-crazed over this great sorrow, and that he was not accountable for the words he uttered.

He turned and gazed at Tornado. Not dead, for the wet flanks were quivering with the short, labored breathing.

"Better ef he was dead, pard," Sam muttered, setting the cold hand of his partner free, knowing that the peril was past for the present. "He's got too hefty a dose fer to ever be hisself ag'in, though he may not die as soon as I think at fu'st, fer-"

"He will live-over to-morrow?" quickly demand Laughlin, a strange fire shooting into his bloodshot eyes.

"Onless he hes another fit like that afore he kin 'cuperate a bit inside. Over to-morrowmebbe fer a week, or a month. But you ain't hopin' fer that, pard? Bad as it is to lose the noble critter, sech a lingerin' misery 'd be heap wuss!"

"There have been cases of complete recovery?" "So they say, but I never see one my own self. I've see'd hosses alive, long after bein' rattled, of course, but they never got back to be one-hafe what they was afore they ketched the dose. An' knowin' what he's bin, you wouldn't want to see him like that? Ef he was give' the say-so, he'd ruther take sudden death than hang on to life a stove-up cripple! You

Leo made no response in words, just then. He moved forward and once more opened the barrier, standing with folded arms over the locoed racer, gazing steadily down at the poor creature. There was a strange expression upon his white face that gave Spread Eagle Sam fresh uneasiness. For the moment he feared the brain of his Dandy Pard had given way before this terrible strain, following his other troubles so closely.

Foolish? If you say so, then you know nothing of the intense love which some men can feel

for a noble horse.

Almost unconsciously a sigh broke from the young man's lips. And following it came the words:

"Poor Tornado! I'd gladly share your pains,

if by so doing I could give you relief!"

Leo hardly knew that he was speaking aloud the thoughts that flashed through his troubled brain, but the sound of his well-known voice caused the black racer to lift his blood-stained muzzle, giving a low, painful whimper of recognition as he turned his glassy eyes toward his loved master.

Coming as it did, when Laughing Leo felt that he was gazing upon one who would never more show recognition, this piteous response proved too much. With a choking gulp he bent and touched the poor head, then turned and rushed out of the stall.

Spread Eagle Sam had to brush his eyes more than once before he could see with sufficient dis-

tinctness to follow after.

He found his partner standing near the gate which led to the plat of ground surrounding the ranch proper. Laughing Leo was outwardly composed, and his voice was cold and steady as he spoke:

"If there is anything that can be done to make him easier, pard, short of killing, will you at-

tend to it?"

"They ain't much that kin be done, but that little don't need the axin', lad," was the gentle response.

"Thanks. I want to keep him alive—over tomorrow, at least. You will find me inside, when

you're through with him."

Cold and ungracious both words and manner seemed, but Spread Eagle Sam did not so regard them. Better than any other man could, he realized what Leo Laughlin was suffering, and what tremendous restraint he was placing upon himself. Little wonder that his manner was unnatural.

Without waiting for a reply, Laughing Leo turned and strode up to the house, entering without giving even a glance toward the curious yet frightened cook and his satellite, who were peeping at their master from around the corner.

Spread Eagle Sam passed over to one of the outbuildings, where he struck a light and rummaged for a short time in an iron-bound box which served him as trunk, wardrobe and treasure-chest all in one. He sifted some finely powdered herbs into a flask of whisky, shaking this vigorously as he closed the box and left the building for the stable.

"They ain't much use, as I see," he muttered, shaking his head dubiously as he stood over the still prostrate racer. "That cussed rattle-weed hes tuck a turrible tight grip o' his in'ards, an' it ain't goin' to let up as long 's thar's life in the

His free hand dropped mechanically to the long knife in his belt, pointing his words; only to release it again as his shaggy head shook neg-

pore critter. Ef I only dast do it!"

atively.

"It'd be a marcy to the critter, but pard-he said not! An' what he says is law an' gospel b'iled down to double stren'th, jest now! Anyway, it ain't me that's goin' to cross him-pore boy!"

While muttering thus, Spread Eagle Sam took a home-made drenching tube from where it hung in one corner; part of a steer's horn, the tip having been cut off and the remainder scraped and polished until it was almost transparent and shone like glass.

With gentle firmness he did the rest; forcing open the jaws of the black racer, twisting his head around as he lifted it from the litter, slipping the drenching-horn far down the animal's throat, emptying into it the contents of his flask, then gently pressing on the gullet with a downward stroking motion, to insure the potion's being swallowed.

"It won't do no harm, even ef it don't do no good," he muttered, as he withdrew the horn and gently lowered the head to the litter again. "Anyway, it's what the boss said, an' you ain't the critter to kick ag'inst that, ole feller. He'd heap ruther do harm to his own self then hev it come to you-don't ye know that, Tornado?"

The black racer partly raised its head, uttering a faint whimper as though in assent. And Spread Eagle Sam brushed a hand hastily over his eyes as he stepped back and out of the box

stall. Once outside the stable, he hurled the empty flask far from him. He clinched his huge fists tightly, dashing them one after the other against the stable door, causing the building to re-echo. And a grim, vicious smile showed his teeth through the tangle of blonde beard as he looked at

the plank, split from top to bottom by those

blows.

"That's a sample o' how I'll sarve you, when I git two eyes onto ye, ye cussed p'izener o' hosses that's high above ye as them stars is higher'n the deepest pit o' hell!" he grated, nodding his head until his long beard and hair flew about his face in a golden cloud.

That little outburst seemed to make Spread Eagle Sam feel considerably better, for he once more entered the stable for a parting look at the

locoed racer.

Tornado was still lying prostrate, but apparently the potion administered by the giant rancher was beginning to have its intended effect. The creature breathed more naturally. convulsive shivering and cramp-like twitches were less violent than before.

"The lad'll hev his way, I reckon," muttered Sam, but with anything but joy in his tones as he again beat a retreat. "Tornado'll be livin' in the mornin', an' he may pull through ef them cussed fits don't come back too soon an' too cluss after each other. But what good? He'll never be the same critter. An' while he lives, he'll only sarve to keep the sore open an' bleedin' like it bleeds now!"

Spread Eagle spoke from past experience with the dreaded weed which has added at least two expressive words to the Western vocabulary. And yet there is remarkably little known about this curse to the stock-growers of the newer Ter-

ritories, considering its evil effects.

For a long time, this was one of the mysteries of ranch life. Without any warning signs, a strange and dangerous epidemic would break out on a ranch, prostrating half or all of the horses thereon. The symptoms were a general emaciation, accompanied with wildly-glaring eyes and unmistakable indications of dementia. Animals so afflicted would rush at a man or other object, with mouth wide open and every appearance of ungovernable frenzy, rearing upon their hind feet and striking out wildly with the fore-legs. And when thus afflicted, two or more horses would fight together, frequently ending only with death.

For a long time no satisfactory cause for this strange disease was discovered. The Spanish term "loco" or crazy, was applied to it, and an animal so affected was said to be "locoed."

At length close and careful observation proved beyond all doubt that feeding upon a certain plant, or weed, was the primary cause. This plant belongs to the order Leguminosæ, of which there are several species, all more or less deleterious in their effects when eaten. Many analyses have been made with the view of ascertaining the active principle possessing such peculiar powers, but with unsatisfactory success thus far.

This plant, as its botanical name implies, belongs to the pea family. It usually has a great many stalks proceeding from a strong rootstalk, and forms a low, bushy plant of a pretty light green. The stalks are branching at the base, and give rise to numerous leaves and stems bearing flowers and seed-pods. The leaflets are of oval form, from one-half to one-quarter of an inch in length, and are of a shining, silvery hue, from being covered with soft, silky hairs. The flower is of a purplish, sometimes yellow color, and has the general appearance of the pea flower. This is succeeded by a pod about an inch in length, very smooth when ripe, and having generally two seeds. One of the most prominent peculiarities of this plant is its hardiness, its delicate green foliage often being seen growing thriftily on the dry and barren plains where but little other vegetation can eke out an existence. It is from this thriftiness and tempting appearance that stock are tempted to feed upon it in the absence of other grasses.

Many attempts have been made at discovering some antidote for the poisonous effects of this weed, but so far unsuccessfully, death generally following its use in a longer or shorter time, according to the amount eaten. In Colorado so great has been the damage done to stock, that a bounty is paid for the destruction of the dangerous growth. It has been proven in that State, however, that when an animal has not indulged too freely in the weed, by removing him at once from the locality and feeding nothing but cultivated grass or hay, the evil effects will in time pass away to a great degree, and the animal may be ridden or worked, though great caution is essential, as it will always be subject to sudden and apparently causeless attacks of mania, resulting in accidents through runaways or otherwise.

This plant is variously known as "loco weed," and "rattle-weed," the last from the peculiar rattling sound made by the seeds in their dry envelope. And an animal which has become diseased by eating it, is said to be "locoed," or "rattled." So common has this latter term become that it passes among the current slang of the day in many localities, as descriptive of those who are deemed in any way non compos.

All of this, and much more, Spread Eagle Sam knew from personal experience, though he had never before met with an instance of the weed growing in that section. Still, it certainly did grow there, for the fragments which he now picked up from where he had flung them in the excitement of his discovery, were still compara-

tively fresh and moist.

"Ef I kin ever ketch the dirty cuss—an' I'll ketch him ef I hev to thump the hull truth out o' every man, woman an' kid they is in the hull durned kentry!-I'll stan' over him an' make him eat a solid ton o' the p'izen stuff! I jes' will, ncw!"

With the poisonous weed crammed into his capacious pocket, Spread Eagle Sam hunted up the frightened cook and his aid, closely questioning them in the vague hopes of obtaining the much coveted clew to the author of that dastardly outrage. But without success. Neither of them had seen any stranger loitering about the premises. True, there were a couple of hours when, having no work to occupy them, they both had taken a snooze—as cook expressed it according to their usual custom. And doubtless it was during this period that the deed was done.

Satisfied that he could effect nothing more that night, Spread Eagle Sam entered the front room where he found Laughing Leo, seated at a rude table, with pen, ink and paper before bim.

"He's restin' some easier, pard," uttered Sam, rightly interpreting the quick glance with which his Dandy Pard greeted him. "I give him a little drench that won't do no harm ef it don't do no good."

"You think he will live through the night,

"I kin make him, ef you want it so," was the slow response, a wistful light in those big blue eyes. "I kin watch over bim, an' keep down the fits by whisky, though the cussed weed 'll be doin' its work on his brain all the same."

"You can tell me how to act, and I'll do the watching." was the calm response, turning and shifting the papers before him until he found the one he was searching for in particular. "Sit down and run your eyes over those figures, pard, please."

Spread Eagle Sam obeyed, though with his troubled air growing more pronounced. He did not like this unnatural coldness. He would greatly prefer a wild outburst of vengeance; at least, that would be more natural, more human

than this icy calm. All at once he gave a great start, turning pale and agitated. What at first looked only a row of unmeaning figures now stood out with painful distinctness. It was a careful and just division of the stock on the Triangle Ranch!

"That's just what I mean, old man," said Laughing Leo, with the ghost of a smile, as he firmly encountered that startled look. "All I want now is your admission that the division is fair and equitable. I wouldn't have left room for the ghost of a doubt, only I knew your stubborn honesty too well to think to cheat you with more than an exact share."

"Say it ag'in, and say it slow, pard," muttered Sam, his breath coming quick and unsteady. "Say jest what you're tryin' to git through ye in tarms plain enough for a thick-head like me

to onderstan'."

"That is not hard," with a short, hard laugh. "I have divided the stock on the place in two equal shares. You are to take one and I'll take the other. We'll shake hands, and each go our own way, good and true friends-but partners no longer.'

"What hev I done to desarve this, pard?" slowly demanded the giant, like one who has to collar and thrust each word out by main force.

"Nothing, old fellow," and Leo reached across to gently pat the strong, muscular hand that was shivering as with an ague. "It is all my doing. I am the Jonah of the Triangle. All our losses and troubles are of my making. And those losses are only just begun-you know that, Sam!"

"What ef I do? Hev you heard me kick ary time?"

"That's just it; you shut your teeth and never make a sign. I'd rather you would kick, and kick hard! It would give me something to fight against here at home-sometling to keep me from-bah!" and Laughlin flung out one hand with a swift, impatient gesture, tossing his head proudly back as he added: "Let that go. And take your paper, old fellow. In the morning we'll divide the stock, share and share alike."

With a grating oath, Spread Eagle Sam crushed the paper in his hand and flung it across the room. His face was strangely pale, but his blue eyes were fairly ablaze as he leaned across the table and asked:

"Jest one word, Leo Laughlin. Do you think I rattled Tornado?"

Laughing Leo stared with wide-open eyes, the answer written on his face even before his quick speech confirmed it. "You-loco Tornado? I'd sooner believe my

own hand did it!"

Spread Eagle Sam leaned back in his chair, brushing the damp from his white brow, a great breath pouring out of his lungs. A sickly smile stole into his face, and his tones were more natural when he spoke:

That does settle it, then! Nothin'shorter of you thinkin' me a cussed sneak like that kin bu'st up our pardnership. Sink or swim, you an' me is one, pard! We went into the business head-up;

ef we've got to come out tail-down, thar'll be mighty white an' good comp'ny fer each of us! An' what more kin ye ax, pard?"

His great paw shot across the table once more, but it was not accepted as he wished. Instead, Leo Laughlin thrust his own behind his back, shaking his head positively as he slowly uttered:

"Never again as partners, Sam-though it cuts me full as deep as it can you! When all the rest is settled, I'll grip your hand until the tears come, if you wish. As friends always, but never again as pards in the stock business."

"You kin kick, but you cain't kick me out. Pards once, pards ever! Lad!" with a depth of emotion that almost suffocated his words, that contorted his face until it was absolutely painful to look upon: "Lad, I'd ruther you rammed a knife full len'th in my durned ole heart then to speak like that! What! me'n' you split? Quit bein' pards? Jest fer a little trouble like this? Durned ef I don't begin to think I've got a dose o' loco my own self! I cain't hear straight no mo'!"

"Your ears are not in fault, old friend," said Laughlin, his tones strained but even. "'You feel hurt now, but after a good sleep, you'll be the first to say that I'm only acting as an honest man and friend should act toward one who is loved eben as hard as he can love in turn.

"You must see that I am a marked man. That enemies are at work to ruin me, none the less busily from working under cover."

"We'll rout 'em out from kiver, an then-Double-durn it all!" with a forced grin of indignation on his broad face. "Don't you think I want a bit o' fun? Don't you reckon I'd inj'y thumpin' the everlastin' stuffin' out o' the cussed snakes when they do break kiver?"

"I'm not denying you that pleasure, old friend-but it must be as a friend, not a partner in business, mind ye! I'll not drag you down to ruin with myself—and that's just what things are coming to."

"Ain't I old enough an' ugly enough to tote my sheer? Ever ketch ole Spread Eagle whimperin'? Then that settles it!"

Despite himself, Leo was forced to laugh at this peculiar mode of reasoning. Sam laughed in company, and forced a broad grin, though the uneasy light in his big eyes told how shallow that smile was.

"You spoke of being locoed, Sam," abruptly added Laughing Leo, in turn leaning across the table, speaking sharply, distinctly. "I reckon I'm the one that's got the dose, and to prove it-listen!

"You say Tornado will be alive in the morning. You say that by using whisky the fits can be staved off. All right! You know the bet I made with Basil Brock to day; five hundred head of market steers that I could beat his horse a two-mile dash?

"I'm going to ride that race on Tornado tomorrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE THAN HORNS AND HOOFS AT STAKE.

DESPITE all that had gone before, Spread Eagle Sam could hardly believe the evidence of his own senses, staring with drooping jaw at the cold, hard face of his Dandy Pard as he mechanically echoed the words that so startled him:

"Ride the race—on Tornado!" Laughing Leo nodded his head slightly as he sunk back in his seat. There was no sign of

jesting to be discovered in his pale face, yet-"It cain't be done, pard, an' you know it!" exploded the giant. "Jest think how the pore critter-but you're tryin' to foolish the ole man -an' me takin' it fer downright gospel!"

A cold smile curled the lips of his partner, and that steely light grew keener and brighter

in his eyes as he retorted: "Is this a time or matter for jesting? Do I look like a man who would crack a silly joke? I mean just what I say: if Tornado is living when the time set for that race comes around, I'll ride it on his back! If he is dead-I'll skin, stuff and carry him to the score on my own

shoulders!" Wild, incredible as this sounds—as it sounded even then to the ears of the ex-hide-hunter-Laughing Leo was in deadly earnest.

It was with a peculiar reluctance that he had entered into that engagement; he had tried by every honorable means to avoid the match, yielding only to pressure which he could not evade without actually laying himself open to the charge of cowardice; but enter into it he had, and this peculiar reluctance but rendered the blow a heavier one now it had fallen after such a dastardly fashion.

And there were other influences at work. none of which were calculated to steady his brain in such an emergency. Those past months had not been without their effect on the young rancher, though until now, he had given no

outward sign. Involuntarily Spread Eagle Sam pushed his seat a little further from the table, drawing his long limbs under his body, ready for swift and keen though I know your eyes are when a friend

he was scarce conscious of doing this, he felt that his Dandy Pard was "growing flighty" and half-looked for him to break out into a fit of frenzy something akin to that in which they had found poor Tornado.

"Locoed—that's what!" dropped from his lips in husky accents. "Plum' crazy, or I'm a -pard!" with a sudden fear that closed upon his heart like a grip of ice. "You didn't tetch it -you didn't take a dose o' that p'izened water back thar?"

The look of sickened horror that spread over his face as he gave panting utterance to this frightful dread, served well its part. Laughing Leo was deeply touched by it, and their hands joined in a tight grip over the table, a more natural look coming into the eyes of the younger man as he spoke again:

"Not a drop touched my lips, old pard, though I don't know but it would have been money in my pocket if that angel-a little offcolor, maybe, but still an angel, Sam-had waited around the corner a few minutes longer. You'd have got even for it, somehow, and—"

gittin' even, pard?" interposed the giant, with a vicious click of his strong teeth.

There was no immediate response. Laughing Leo released his hand, resting both elbows on the table, his temples pressed tightly between his palms as his eyes stared unseeingly at the papers which he had been looking over when Spread Eagle Sam came into the room.

The giant watched him furtively, that dread fear not yet killed in his heart. This was so unlike the usual manner of his Dandy Pard, whose spirits seemed strangers to depression, whose bright face and gay laugh had made the ranch more of a home than Sam had ever known before.

True, the poisoning of Tornado was enough to knock any man off his balance, but there was something beyond sorrow and rage in this conduct. There was something below the surface which, as yet, he could not even give a guess at.

Spread Eagle Sam stood this suspense until it grew unbearable, then reached across the table and touched Laughing Leo on the arm.

"Pard, shell I take an' chaw up the rest o' this durned truck fer my own supper?" he said, pulling the broken and bruised stems of loco weed out of his pocket, dropping them on the table. "Ef you don't, then come out o' that spell an' let me see ye my ole pard ag'in! Mebbe I'm a durned ole fool fer feelin' so, but ef this goes on my own self!"

Not precisely what he wished to say, but it was enough, added to the quivering of his strong hand and the piteous appealing look in his great pop-eyes. Laughing Leo noted both, and that icy, unnatural calm was broken.

True, it was but the ghost of his old gay laugh that bubbled forth as he caught that trembling hand—a hand that fear of fee could never shake as love was shivering it now! But there was something more natural in both smile and voice as he spoke again:

"You refused to take warning and the freedom I offered you, old fellow, so at least a portion of the blame belongs to yourself. As a pard, you feel in duty bound to share my troubles; as a stranger-I'll not say it, even in jest, Sam. You and I will never be anything but pards while there's life and breath in our bodies. And yet-"

"When ye come to a good stoppin' place, stop!" interposed the big rancher, smiling through the tears that had come into his eyes despite his rapid winking. "Pards we be, an' pards we stay. They ain't no other way. An' so let it camp down right thar!'

"If you will have it so, old fellow," with a faint smile. "Surely I ought to be willing. You give everything, and get— Sam, if you've got a single grain of common sense left in your a bit ago; you'll accept a division of the stock, shake hands and say good-by pard!"

"I'd ruther be called a durn fool, ef you don't mind, lad."

Sam laughed as he spoke, but that assumed mirth could not cover over the strong emotion that lay under the words. Then, if never before, Laughing Leo must have seen how deeply, wholly he was loved by his big pard.

"I'll never call you that, Sam, whatever I may think, but others will when they see where I am leading you."

"The same mouth won't say it twice, any-

how." "That is just why I want to divide, old fellow," with an increase of gravity in voice and face. "I know your hot temper. I know that you won't stand crowding. I know that when you do bite you make your teeth meet in the flesh, and only loose your grip when the mouthful comes out with it. But the whole country is against you, and no two men can fight the lot with any hope of success."

"Ef two men cain't, how kin one?" "That one, if you mean me, don't expect to come out on top," was the quiet response. "See here, pard, there's more in this than you suspect. decisive action at a moment's warning. Though 'is in trouble. You know how hard I took the

poisoning of poor Tornado, but it was not all because I value him so highly, though I'd give my left hand to put him back where he was only this morning."

"Then thar's somethin' more than hoofs an' horns in this bet? Be durned ef I didn't think it fus't off," ejaculated Spread Eagle, bringing his clinched fist down on the table with a mighty thump.

The face of Laughing Leo turned a shade paler, and that strangely troubled light returned to his eyes. For a brief space he averted his head, but then faced his big pard fully, speaking coldly, earnestly:

"You're right—there's much more in it than horns and hoofs. I thought I'd never trouble you with the story, old fellow, but I know you'll be better content if you see the whole affair just as I do."

"I'm willin' to take it all on trust, pard," was the swift interposition, as Spread Eagle gently touched the hand of his friend. "I've knowed you long enough fer that. When I like a body I like him all over an' clean through. Don't say "What's the matter with all two both on us another word ef it cuts too deep. I'd ruther not hear it, pard."

Laughing Leo smiled faintly as he looked at

the speaker. "Every word you utter is but piling on top another reason for my making a clean breast of it, old fellow. My mind is fully made up. You might as well make up yours to listen to a long and-worse luck-mighty disagreeable revelation!

"You know all we have gone through of late months; you know what dastardly blows have been dealt at us by enemies from under cover; so I'll not run over them now. I'll simply explain why they have fallen, as I have reasoned it out in my own mind.

"But, first, I want your solemn pledge not to take a step toward getting even without first consulting with me. You'll give it, Sam?"

The big rancher hesitated, but it was only long enough for a single keen glance into the eyes of his Dandy Pard. Then his huge hand was stretched across the table, and he replied:

"Thar you hev it, pard. I ain't afeard to go it blind when you ax it of me-no I ain't, honey!"

Their hands closed in a warm grip, then Laughing Leo resumed: "You know considerable of my rast life,

Sam, though it has never been a subject of conversation between us. You know that my trail much longer, I'll bu'st a flue or go plum crazy has had more than one ugly crook in it, though I've tried to make it open and straight ever since you and I crossed palms."

"Straight as a string an' true as a die, pard!" muttered Spread Eagle, earnestly. "The past is past; why fetch it up now?"

"To show you why I find myself in such an ugly box to-night, old fellow," was the grave response. "Don't think it a pleasure to me. I'd give my right hand if I could blot out the past. But it is there, and no regrets of mine can alter it one iota.

"You was the close friend of old Kirkendall, Sam, and so you must have known of the part my mother played in his life. I'm not upholding the course she took. She never showed much mother-love for me. She cast me off to hunt for myself when I was but a child, else I might have grown up a different sort of man. But still—she was my mother, and it comes hard to say what I must say to-night.

"You know that she cherished a deadly hatred for Morris Kirkendall to the very last. You know the plot she formed against him, and in which I consented to take a part. You know how that plot failed, and how I made what amends I could."

"I know you acted clean white, an' nobody'll stick to that harder than little Beauty-bird her own self!" interposed Spread Eagle.

"God bless her!" fervently muttered Laughcomposition, you'll take me at the offer I made | ing Leo, involuntarily glancing upward as the prayer fell from his lips; for prayer it was. "If I'm a better man now, it is she who deserves the thanks. When I learned to love Luada Kirkendall, I began to see how evil my life had been. But let that go. I lost her-a better man won and wears her."

Spread Eagle Sam shook his head as though he could not subscribe to this, but he contented himself with an inarticulate growl.

"Among the party my mother led on that expedition, was a man who had once been an officer in the regular army. He passed by the name of Major John Westgate, I believe: Major Jack he was more generally called. Then, I knew little or nothing about him, nor did I seek to learn more at the time. I saw but little of him, and simply thought of him, when I took even so much trouble, as being one of the lawless gang who followed my mother's lead. What I am about to tell you, I learned afterward.

"This man's real name was Wesley Kimball, and he had been a major, as he still called himself. Drinking, gambling, and in the end a heavy forgery led to his being cashiered and dismissed from the service in disgrace. Then be rapidly went to the bad, until he finally met my mother, and fell a victim to her charmsyou have seen her, Sam!"

Spread Eagle nodded assent. The beautiful

face of the "She Wolf" rose before his mind's eye, and even now he could hardly realize that, herself looking scarcely as old, even then she had a son full five-and-thirty years of age.

"This Kimball," rapidly resumed Laughing Leo, "was a man with a wife and family when he was turned out of the army. He deserted them then, even as he had neglected them for years before. Still, he had a wife and family, for neither applied for a divorce,

up to that time.

"You know when my mother captured Luada and Purchass, when they were eloping together. You know I saw them go, and made no effort to hinder them, knowing right well the cunning trap into which they were running their heads. You know where they were taken—to the cave, where, afterward, my mother met her death by her own hand, exulting in the belief that I was carrying out the bitter revenge she had sworn.

"But there is one thing you never learned: that is how my mother stabbed Wesley Kimball to the heart for daring to protect Luada Kirkendall from her savage fury. Remember: he died by her hand, and she was my mother!"

His voice grown husky and unsteady, Laughing Leo ceased speaking and partly averted his ghastly pale face. Spread Eagle Sam said nothing, though honest sympathy beamed forth from every feature. As yet he failed to catch the real drift of this recital, though he could see it was bitter as death to the lips that gave it shape.

Leo Laughlin quickly regained his self-com-

mand, and resumed;

"Wesley Kimball's wife, when she could learn nothing more of him, though years had passed since his dismissal from the army, finally applied for and secured a divorce. Although she knew it not at the time, death had divorced her nearly a month before that application was made.

"She resumed her maiden name, and her children took the same; at least her eldest, a son, did so. And to-day he is known as Basil

Brock!"

Spread Eagle Sam leaped to his feet with a sounding oath, his big eyes filling with a light of comprehension.

"That does settle it! He's the snake-in-thegrass that's bin bitin' our heels all this time." "I've known it for months, old fellow," quietly uttered Laughing Leo, just the ghost of a smile flitting across his handsome face.

"Knowed it—you? Knowed it—an' never let on by word or look to me nur nobody else?" exploded the giant, staring as though unable to believe the evidence of his own senses. "Knowed it—an' let the cussed whelp go on an' on, an' never once shet your grip onto him? Pard, be durned ef I don't think you're lyin' to me-I jes' do !"

"It was hard," slowly responded Leo, grave enough now. "It was hard, but mainly because

you were a joint sufferer with me." "Why not, bein' as we was, an' is, an' ever

will be, pardners?"

"But when I knew that his father died by the hand of my own mother, what was I to do?"

"Lick the stuffin' out o' that daddy's sonwhy not?" boldly retorted Spread Eagle, though a change of color told how nearly he guessed the motive that had held his Dandy Pard in check. "It wasn't you that got his pap turned out o' the army, was it? You didn't ram him chuck full o' benzine, nur make him gamble, nur yit write the name of a better man to a bit o' paper, did ye? No! Then what's the use lookin' back so fur, an' through sech smoky spectacles? The deviltry was did long afore you knowed the critter. What ef he did die; your han' never tetched him, did it?"

"My mother killed him. His son knows it. My mother is dead and beyond his reach, but her son lives. If I was in his shoes, I'd try to even up old scores as best I could—and so would

you, pard!"

"But not by pi'zenin' hosses - not by Laughing Leo. chuckin' rattle-weed to a hoss ag'inst which I'd

bet a herd o' cattle!" with angry scorn. "All men are not like you—worse luck!" with a faint smile that died in its birth. "Basil Brock takes his own way. And you must remember that he has tried often enough to provoke me into fighting him. Do him so much justice, at any rate."

"An' beca'se he was his daddy's son, you wouldn't fight him? That is why you've tuck so much more'n I ever thought to see you take, knowin' you so well, knowin' that ef you liked, you could take an' double him over your knee like a babby? All right," with a sharp nod of his shaggy head, his big eyes fairly blazing. "They ain't nothin' holdin' my han's. I've lost the same as you've lost, up to pore Tornado. An' I'll ax Mister Basil Brock to step up to the cap'n's office to settle old a'counts, sure as he comes to the meetin' to-morrow!"

"Not against your promise, pard," with a short laugh. "You've passed your word, and

I know you'll never break that." "Then you'll take the sprout in han'? You

won't let him go now, after locoin' Tornado?" "I am not sure he did loco him," slowly. "J. hope I'll never know that for sure. If I didlet that pass. I don't want to even think of it.

The temptations have tried me too strong already!"

"There is still more back, Sam," he added,

in his former cold, even tones. "Basil Brock hates me as the son of the woman who killed his father, but I believe he hates me still more for something else. You know how crazy-mad in love with Miss McAvoy the fellow is? Well, to this older hatred is added jealousy."

"But the durn fool ham't got no cause fer that, pard? Surely you ain't goin' to hitch up with that gal?" and as he spoke Spread Eagle Sam fairly held his breath with apprehension. Laughing Leo shook his head negatively.

"Don't think it, old fellow. I've loved once -you know that. If I ever love again, it will be a woman different from Miss McAvoy as

night is from day."

"I might 'a' knowed it, an yit-pard, more'n once o' late days that fear hes tuck me mighty nigh whar I lived! I cannot jest say why, but somehow it's looked to me as though you was gittin' hit hard by a petticut o' some sort! An' that's why it paralyzed me when you said us two was to quit pardin' right off! A wife, says I to myself!"

What caused that soft flush to steal into the handsome face of the young rancher? What made his thoughts turn to the Indian girl at the poisoned spring? Surely he was not falling in love—and with a girl of Indian blood?

"I'm a mighty glad to hear it, though!" added Spread Eagle, frowning darkly. "Mebbe I'm a fool: mebbe I'm 'way off in my thinkin', but fer the life o' me I cain't make it come even that yender wild Irishman an' his gal is jest as squar' as a die! Be durned ef I wouldn't like to take easy odds that they're both on 'em mixed up with the gang that's doin' all o' this hoss an' stock stealin'!"

Laughing Leo shook his head. He could not go that far, though he had no particular love for Finn McAvoy. Nor, for that matter, did he wholly admire Queen Sate. She was admirable company, but as a woman-and once more, the dusky, yet fair face of Meta-lupa rose

before him. With an impatient toss of his head he banished

that vision.

"You know how long I've steered clear of coming into actual rivalry with Basil Brock, pard. You know how hard he rubbed me every day since this round-up began. And then-well I couldn't take such a rude bluff before Queen Sate, and the match was made."

"An' all the time the durned cur was ready to

loco Tornado!"

"We neither of us know that for certain, Sam," with forced calmness. "If I did-let it pass, I say!" with sudden anger.

Spread Eagle subsided once more, and Laugh-

ing Leo added:

"I made the bet, and though no particular horses were named, of course everybody took it for granted that his bay and my black were to run for the horns. I meant it so, and if Tornado is living at the hour set, I'll ride him for the herd!"

"That would be his death, sure, pard!"

"You said that he would choose death rather than live on a cripple, subject to those frightful spells. How could be die better than in saving the honor of his master?"

Sam looked very grave, but he said nothing. He knew that words of his would be of no avail,

while Laughlin was in this mood.

"This resolve is one reason why I wanted to dissolve partnership with you, old fellow. While I have a right to risk my property after my own fashion, I have no right to throw away yours. So, since you refuse to dissolve, I'll take this bet on my own shoulders. I've got enough to pay my losses and leave a neat lump for the locoing demon to take another whack at!"

"Pards in one thing, pards in all," doggedly muttered Sam.

"Not in this mad wager," firmly retorted Spread Eagle Sam leaned over the table and

gazed steadily into those glowing eyes. Firmly his own were met, and as he saw no signs of yielding there, the giant rancher abruptly rose to his feet, stripping the belt of arms from around his waist and laying it on the table, which he picked up and set in one corner.

Returning, he gravely disarmed his Dandy Pard after the same fashion, not a muscle of his hard-set face altering under the wondering gaze

of the younger member of the firm. "What's got into you, old man? Surely you've not been drinking?" ejaculated Leo, as

Spread Eagle motioned him to rise to his feet. Never a word in reply, as the giant carried both chairs over to the corner where he had placed the table, thus leaving the center of the room perfectly clear. Never a word as he strode back and confronted the astonished man, rolling up his sleeves to the elbow. Then-

"Strip an' put up your paws pard. I'm goin' to lick sense into you, or hev the sense licked out o'my own self. I'm goin' to hev my sheer in that bet, or a hole in the ground—that's swore

to!" Laughing Leo gazed keenly into his honest face, but he saw nothing save dogged resolution there. And with a sudden dimming of his eyes,

he extended his open hand, which Sam caught with a sob that was a curious mixture of joy, love and intense relief.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEREIN CICERO GROWETH INQUISITIVE. "Don't care if I do, since it is you, Miss: McAvoy," bowed Cicero Boggs, passing his glass, with a low bow, a sudden smile filling his face, and a merry laugh parting his lips. "'Pon my word, ma'am, I never passed a more thoroughly agreeable evening since my memory began! And-now you wouldn't believe it, but actually when I set out on this important mission, I labored under the delusion that I wasbound for the most God-forsaken region imaginable! That if I ever happened to run across anything milder than wild beasts and lawless desperadoes, it could only be some native bellecopper belle, you know!-whose charms consisted mainly of a chew of tobacco and an army blanket! Perfectly ridiculous, wasn't it,. ma'am?"

"Precisely what I would have expected-of

Mr. Cicero Boggs."

"Eh?" and it was wonderful how quickly that jolly laugh died out, leaving only the most shadowy of smiles behind. "Is that another of your-your delightful jokes, Miss McAvoy? You see they're not quite—not just as penetrating as they would be but for this deliciously strong punch, ma'am! Or-that don't sound precisely as I meant it should, either," with a dubious shake of the head and a half-nervous: look into that beautiful face. "Really, ma'am,. that ugly tumble I got to-day must have jumbled my poor brain all up! I know there was a good pun somewhere when I began: something untangled from strong punch, my head and penetrating; but—beg your pardon."

"You do me entirely too much honor, Mr. Cicero Boggs," Queen Sate uttered, her lips: curling as she leaned back in her chair and gazed at the gentleman from Minneapolis through her half-closed lids. "I was never guilty of attempting a jest in all my life. I am far toostupid to make or appreciate a pun, though I shudder as I realize the unfathomable depth to which I must fall in your estimation as I make the admission. But truth is my guiding star, and truth compels me to add-too abominably

diaphanous, Wirt Dalton, Esquire!"

Cicero Boggs abruptly replaced his emptied glass on the table, leaning forward and gazing steadily into the face of his fair hostess. Queen Sate met his gaze without flinching, yet without changing her indolent, careless attitude or look. "Then you wasn't jesting? You actually

mistook me for some mysterious personage-a

detective, and all that?"

"No, I didn't," with a low, purring laugh. "Not a bit of a mistake about it, my dear fellow. I know you are a detective!"

Cicero Boggs smiled the ghost of a smile, his brows arching, one hand rubbing his chin as he feebly ventured:

"If you say so, of course it must be correct. but-you couldn't tell me just who I'm to draw-

against for my salary, ma'am?"

"It's hardly worth while, unless there is back pay due you. Still, if you care to have me, and will jot down the proper names and address: of your legal heirs, I'll take pleasure in letting them know the precise manner and hour of your discharge. Or are you hired to hunt men to the gallows by the month, or year?"

"Is it a conundrum, ma'am?" feebly gasped Cicero Boggs, the personification of utter help-

lessness.

Queen Sate cast off all pretense, her eyes glowing vividly, her face flushed, her voice sharp and decisive as she leaned across the table, speak-

ing rapidly: "It is cold truth, Wirt Dalton, as you know without repetition. You rlay the part you have assumed by way of a blind to your real character, but not well enough to make me forget what my own eyes saw and my own ears heard. I know you. I know what has brought you to these parts. Even better than you can, bloodhound though you are by trade and nature, I realize the peril you are encountering by cominghere in disguise. And, once for all, I warn you to get out of this section with the least possibleloss of time, unless you are yearning for a bloody

grave!" "A detective—I, a detective!" muttered Cicero Boggs, like one whose vocal organs are working of their own accord without stopping for orders from headquarters. "And-she don't look like she was joking, but-eh?"

Queen Sate frowned, striking her little fist sharply on the polished table before her, the action causing her guest to start in his seat and

rally his scattered wits. "You idiot!" was the not very complimentary title that sprung from those red lips. "Have I not yet convinced you your flimsy mask is no proof against my memory for names and faces?

Listen, then: "This spring I paid a visit to Chicago. Among other objects of interest to country sight-seers, there was a celebrated criminal being tried for his life. Possibly you, as a lawyer's clerk, may have heard of this before," with a macking noch

and undisguised smeer.

"Shop, my dear Miss McAvoy, has but slight attractions for men of our profession, unless we are actively engaged in the case, you know."

"And you were in this case," was the swift retort. "You were one of the principal witnesses against the poor devil in the dock. It was mainly by your evidence that he was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he was dead-and all the rest of the legal rigmarole."

"Indeed, ma'am-"

that I am lying, when I swear you are the same person who was pointed out to me then as the notorious-or was it famous?-detective, Wirt Dalton?"

"Changed—decidedly I must have been changed, and never even suspected the atrocious deed until this very instant!" murmured C cero Boggs, with a doleful shake of the head. "Eh? Lie? I'd bite my own tongue off first, ma'am!"

"Then you admit that you are the detective,

Wirt Dalton?"

"If you affirm it, ma'am," with increasing meekness.

Queen Sate gazed at the man intently for a few moments, then broke into a laugh, as she added:

"Let it go at that, then! I know you are the detective I saw in Chicago. I know you are no more a lawyer's clerk than I am an angel. And knowing this, I can readily guess why you are in this part of the country: playing the role of bloodhound, on the scent of some criminal.

"For the life of me I can't imagine why I am taking so much trouble on your account. Certainly I have no particular love for men in your profession; it is too devilishly calculating, too mercilessly cruel, necessary though it may be, to win either the sympathy or the admiration of a woman who has a heart or conscience remaining unseared. And yet-you have broken bread beneath our roof!"

"Remarkably good bread, too!" murmured

Cicero Boggs.

"Let the reasons go hang!" impatiently added Queen Sate, her face growing harder, sterner than before. "I am not the only one in this section who has been to Chicago. There are many eyes as keen and memories as clear as mine. You were pointed out to me as one of the celebrated characters of the great city, and you may have been pointed out to others in the same manner.

"Your disguise is good enough, perhaps, and you play the part you have assumed almost to perfection; but I penetrated both, almost at the first glance. What I have done, still others may do; but the result will hardly be the same. You

can appreciate that, Wirt Dalton!"

"It wouldn't be any use to gently insinuate that your beautiful eyes were leading you astray, ma'am?" meekly ventured Cicero Boggs.

"Though you were to deny your identity from this until broad daylight, it wouldn't change my

belief one iota!"

"Then, I must be this—this bloodhound! Wonder what Maggie will say? A bloodhound for a husband! And the little ones—good Lord!"

Cicero Boggs broke down with a gasping

groan. It was too much!

"If you are really a man of family, so much the more reason for your acting on my advice," interpose Queen Sate, deep earnestness in both face and tones. "It would be worse than folly for you to attempt flight to-night; if seen by any person at odds with the law-and there is no lack of such men in these parts, worse luck!that would all the more surely arouse ugly suspicions. And to be suspected by such men is to be put out of the way in the shortest manner."

"But if there is no ground for suspicion?" ven-

tured Boggs.

"Don't bring that up again, I beg of you!" with an impatient frown. "You are Wirt Dalton. You have admitted as much in looks, if not words."

"And Maggie's the wife of a-ugh!" "In the morning you can take your horse-or if has too lame for good service on the road, I'll see that you have another mount. You will lose no time in getting out of this part of the country. I'll wish you good-speed, and send you fairly on your way. After that-well, if you dron by the wayside, my hands and conscience will be clear, at all events."

A sull len and complete change came over the man as Queen Sate finished speaking. He seemed more a man of business, and his feeble flip-

panry had all vanished.

"Although you are greatly mistaken in your guess, Miss McAvoy, I am just as grateful for your kindness. I am just what I claimed to be. when we first met. I am looking for Melchoir Parkindale, or such heirs as he may have left behind him in case he is dead. Still, since the resemblance between this Wirt Dalton and myself must be remarkably strong to so thoroughly deceive vour eyes, I'd be a fool not to keep on my guard against others making the same mistake. And after the race-meeting to-morrow, I'll act on your advice and make tracks for home and safety!"

Through this rapid speech, Queen Sate sat in silence, keenly watching the speaker as if expecting to catch him tripping. But if so she was disappointed. And a dark frown came into her face at the last sentence, for it told her that she had spent her breath in vain.

"If you attend that meeting, the odds are that you'll never make the return trip! The whole neighborhood will be in attendance, and among so many you can hardly hope to escape recognition as Wirt Dalton, the detective."

"But what else can I do, ma'am!" with an ap-"Do you dare deny it? Dare you even hint pealing look. "You don't know the house, ma'am, or you'd see that in fleeing from a possible peril, I'd be running right up against a positive one. Ugh!" with a nervous shrug and shiver. "Think if the firm should ever find out! Think if it should come to their ears that I, their confidential clerk and chosen embassador, had run away from the task assigned him, just as there was a fine prospect of gaining some information by which this long-missing Melchoir Parkindale might be found—and thus add a rare lump to the bank account of said firm! Just think of it—for I'm blessed if I want to!"

"So be it, then!" and Queen Sate refilled her legs-who knows?" glass from the generous bowl. "We'll drop a vail over the past hour, and I agree to forget that I ever saw or heard of Wirt Dalton, if you agree to forgive my impertinence in trying to save a man who wouldn't be saved! Is it a bar-

gain, Mr. Boggs?"

"If I may first thank you for-"

"Having failed, no thanks are due," was the quick interposition as Queen Sate laughingly declined the hand that was thrust across the table to shake hers. "Your good health, Mr. Boggs."

Thus Finn McAvoy found them when he returned, and had the wishes of that giant alone been consulted, thus the dawning of a new day would have found himself and guest. But Queen Sate asserted her rights as hostess, reminding them that a busy day awaited them all, and an hour later found Cicero Boggsin an upper cham-

Not preparing for bed, though a very comfortable looking one was wholly at his service. Instead, he stood in the middle of the room, his head bowed, his hands clasped behind him, his face grave and hard as though his reflections were not of the brightest or most agreeable.

For minute after minute he stood thus, motionless as though suddenly turned to stone. Until a

sound from below startled him.

He glanced rapidly around the room, taking in its contents, noting the bed, wash-stand, chair, and the one window without curtain or shade.

He blew out the light, then moved noiselessly to the window, standing to one side and a little back as though fearing to expose himself. Just why he observed this caution, might have puzzled himself to explain, but before many minutes passed he found cause for congratulating himself on observing it

The chamber to which he had been assigned was located in one end of the ranch, and thanks to the light of the nearly full moon, now well above the horizon, he was given a pretty extensive view. Yet, after the first searching look over this wide prospect, Cicero Boggs confined his watching to a much narrower compass.

To be rewarded at last by catching sight of a figure moving silently along only a few yards from the base of the building—the figure of a woman—and that woman none other than Queen Sate, who was looking up at his window.

A barely audible laugh came bubbling up in the throat of Cicero Boggs as he recognized the queenly figure below. Possibly he fancied that, despite his having declared himself a married man, with an interesting family of little olivebranches growing up about their mother's knee, this queenly Belle of the Range had fallen romautically in love with him-for surely nothing but romance of the most sentimental type could lure Queen Sate out to gaze up at his window.

If so, the cool night air quickly wroght a cure, for the next moment Queen Sate turned aud

vanished from whence she came.

Cicero Boggs, a curious smile upon his face, silently brought a chair to the window, sitting down and composing himself as though for a long vigil. Not a word escaped his lips. Only that smile.

For full two hours he sat thus in waiting, his keen eyes roving here and there over the plain, broken here and there by a clump of trees or shrubbery. Then-he gave a start and drew in a long breath as he caught sight of what seemed a bright star—but a star that seemed to rest on the ground for a short space, then to spring into life and motion, turning and wheeling, performing eccentric circles and figures in the air, yet never rising much above the level of a human head.

"A signal!" muttered Cicero Boggs, nodding his head with the air of one who had been expecting something of the sort, sooner or later. "Dollars to cents I can name the one that will

answer it." If he did so, it was mentally, for not another word passed his lips as he waited and watched, even after the bright star vanished from view into one of the clumps of trees, as he could now see. At least, the star had gone through its eccentric performance just on the edge of them.

It was nearly half an hour later that Cicero Boggs caught sight of a human figure moving away from the ranch and in the direction of that vanished signal. Then something like an oath broke hissingly from his lips, and the moonlight showed both astonishment and disappointment imprinted upon his face.

"A man-not her! I could have sworn she would be the one to answer that signal. If not, why was she looking to see if my light was put

out? If not-why not?"

A low, barely audible laugh came from his lips as he carefully, noiselessly tried the window. It was secured only by a simple catch at one side, and rose under his pressure without a sound. He let it rest at the top catch, turning to the bed, after a single keen glance from the sill to the ground.

"A drop down wouldn't hurt, but how about dropping up again?" he muttered, as he opened his saddle-bags, which he had brought to the chamber with him, slipping therefrom a brace of business-like revolvers, together with a cartridge-belt. "That's an after consideration, anyhow. Maybe I'll come back on other bodies'

Buckling the belt around his waist, Cicero Boggs returned to the window, gazing intently across the moonlighted space. He soon caught sight of that figure, almost at the clump of trees before which the star-signal had been displayed.

"It's risky, but I reckon I can make the riffle! I could dispense with a little of that light," glancing up at the moon as it sailed in a cloudless sky, "but beggars mustn't be choosers, and I'll get there, all the same!"

He saw the dark figure fade from view, and without waiting longer he slipped through the opening, feet foremost, hanging to the sill by his hands for a moment to steady himself, then drop-

ping to the ground.

He made scarcely more noise than a cat would in performing the same feat, but crouching low against the building he held his breath and listened intently. Not a sound came to his ears in token that his movements had attracted attention, and creeping along the building until at the corner from whence his movements could be seen from the least number of windows, he made off at good speed.

Not in a direct line for the clump of trees where his curiosity was centered. Tenderfoot though he might be, Cicero Boggs was far too wise or prudent for that. He veered to the left, putting a second patch of timber between himself and the one from which the signal had been

displayed.

Satisfied now that he was in no danger of being seen, Cicero Boggs ran swiftly along until his chosen cover was reached. Closely skirting this, he gazed eagerly across to the other timber, now only a short quarter of a mile distant.

A vivid light flashed in his eyes as he shortly distinguished several figures on the further side of the cover, moving slowly on as though to gain the main body of timber beyond.

"I may be too late, but I don't think it," he muttered, crouching low down and moving rapidly onward. "Those may be only the cnes who signaled the ranch, and I may run heads square with the fellow who answered them, coming back; but I don't think it. So here she goes!"

Keeping an eye on the retreating figures until they vanished in the timber, Cicero Boggs stole on, skirting the clump of trees instead of passing through it, so satisfied was he that his game had

passed on with the others. It was a risky business when once clear of cover, forced to move across a level stretch where there was nothing to cover him, while the clear light of the moon made all objects as visible as day in the open. Very inquisitive indeed must this lawyer's clerk be, to run such reril; very curious or very foolhardy; but Cicero Boggs never hesitated.

Fortune seemed inclined to favor him, for he succeeding in reaching the line of undergrowth bordering the heavier timber without having a challenge or a shot hurled at him from those he was trying to spy upon. And as he noiselessly wormed his way through the brush, lying flat on his stomach and looking like some curiously deformed lizard, his keen ears caught the faint, humming sound of human voices in busy conversation, apparently at no great distance from his location.

He listened intently. He could not distinguish either voice or words, but he could give a tolerably accurate guess as to the distance which separated himself and the strangers, and thus guided he lost little time in reaching a position where he could hear if he could not see what was going on.

Something of surprise was mingled with the half-defiant, half-mocking light that glowed in his eyes as he caught the clear voice of the first

speaker:

"There's no possible chance for a mistake, I tell you! I knew the bloodhound the instant I clapped my two eyes on his face. He is a demon on the trail, so report has it, and never lets up his grip until at the foot of the scaffold!"

"If you say so-" "I do say so, most emphatically. I say that the entire company is in danger while that man draws the air of this region into his lungs. I say

that he is one of the deadliest bloodhounds the law ever put on the track of better men. And in giving you this warning, my responsibility is at an end."

"He'll never go back to tell what he's diskivered," came a growling voice. "Say the word an' I'll call on him in his own room. They ain't nothin' I take more fun in then slittin' the wizzen o' jest sech breed o' dogs as them!"

Pleasant, surely, for an eavesdropper! But Cicero Boggs neither fainted with terror nor l tried to escape by flight. Instead he listened, listened all the more closely to the words of the next speaker; to the same voice that had, earlier in the night, warned him of danger—the voice of Queen Sate herself!

"Not that, Johnson. I'll have no blood shed so near home. Take word to the chief, warning him that there is mischief brewing; tell him I say so. The rest of you keep an eye on the fellow, and see that he has no chance for making trouble right here. I'll point him out to you at the race meeting to-morrow."

in yet another voice. "I'll engage to spot a detective by scent at first glance!"

A low, musical laugh followed this speech, and the voice of Queen Sate made response:

"Not in this case, dear boy! You'll open your eyes to their widest extent when I point out my gentle bloodhound, for of all the green tenderfeet, he looks the greenest! And carries out his part nearly to perfection, too! If I hadn't marked his face in Chicago, feeling that the time would come, sooner or later, when he would be trying his tricks in this section, I'd never have spotted-"

That was the last word Cicero Boggs distinguished.

There was not the faintest sound to warn him of impending danger, and the first intimation he

received was also the last. A heavy weight fell fairly upon his back, and

a crushing blow descended full upon his head, instantly depriving him of consciousness if not of life as well.

CHAPTER X.

OLD JOHN'S FAMILY CIRCLE.

RED-FOOT left the B. B. Ranch on foot, but he had no intention of completing his journey after the same fashion. Indian vagabond though he seemed to the majority, he was not so poor as to be without a horse, though he had intercepted | but it was more by force of habit than from any Basil Brock so far from the ranch without that comfortable aid.

Ten minutes after parting with the young rancher, he was mounted and riding away through the moonlight, hugging his precious bundle of finery to his ragged bosom, now and then breaking into a laugh that was in strong contrast to the traditional stoicism of his peo-

"For a squaw—yes!" he laughed, tossing his bare head with malicious glee, mingled with contempt. "How his eyes flashed and his lips curled with angry scorn as he asked me that! Did I expect him to hunt me up a squaw? Ha! ha! Red-foot Injun, but he ketch own squawugh!"

Lucky for Red-foot that Basil Brock was too far away to catch that mocking tone, to note the malicious sneer that filled both voice and face. Lucky for the young rancher, after another fashion; his dreams that night might not have been quite so full of exultation!

Red-foot was a true Indian in his style of riding, at least, and spared neither quirt nor spur when once in the saddle. Over the level plain, up slope and down incline he pressed at full speed, the reins hanging loose, one hand clutching fast to his bundle of gay clothes, the other gripping the short, cruel whip, a vicious lash from which rewarded each partial stumble or sign of falling off in speed.

More than once he cast a glance in the direction of the Triangle Ranch, the light of the full moon showing a grin on his bronzed face as though he found something particularly pleasing in his relation to the new firm and its belongings. Yet his course did not once carry him within eyesight of the ranch itself, leaving it to the right as he dashed on toward the broken country above.

It was a long ride—full half-a-day's journey for a civilized rider—but Red-foot never drew rein from one end to the other, and only once or twice permitted his panting horse to drop into a walk in order to catch its breath, until the comparatively level ground was left behind him, and he entered a narrow, rock-strewn valley, where even an Indian horseman must be hard pressed before he would attempt to traverse it at speed, in the night.

Though the moon was now quite high up in the clear heavens, the side walls of the valleyalmost a canyon in depth and narrowness-cut off its direct rays as yet, and the trail which Red-

foot followed was in deep shadow. That this was no fresh trail to his panting steed, was sufficiently clear from the ease with which the creature picked its way, showing neither doubt or irresolution, though its master never troubled to touch the reins. Nor did Red-foot make any objections as the panting

animal turned abruptly into a narrow opening to the left, coming to a halt when a few rods away from the main valley. Instead, the red-skin vagabond sprung lightly to the ground, carefully depositing his precious bundle on a dry bowlder while he stripped his sweat-dripping steed of its equipage. He turned the horse loose, then hid the furniture in a snug retreat part way up the steep bank, stepping with caution from stone to stone, making never a misstep even in the gloom.

Leaving the horse to care for itself, Red-foot descended and took up his package, tucking it under his arm as he retraced his way to the main valley. Turning in the same direction he had followed ever since first entering the valley, Red-foot kept on for a few hundred yards, showing no incertitude though the side walls of the narrow valley were rapidly converging into a single ridge, steep and rocky, looking like a barrier impassable for aught save-a mountain cat or a big-horn.

And then—the silent figure seemed to vanish— "Hardly any need of that," was the response, to melt into air or to pierce the rocky base of self. Cook me some meat." the cul-de-sac itself.

> There was a simple solution to this seeming mystery, however, and the narrow, low-roofed passage into which Red-foot plunged, was no secret to many of the cowboys and ranch-owners round about. It was curious, but simply a freak of nature such as has more than one par-

> Instead of the valley being "no thoroughfare," as an imperfect inspection would lead one to believe, a narrow tunnel-like passage led directly through the high curve of rocks, and following this opening, one would emerge into a second valley almost precisely similar to the one opposite. Here, as there, the walls of the valley came together in an obtuse angle. From this side, as from the other, only a close search by a stranger would reveal the means of going further in that direction.

> Red-foot hurried through the tunnel, stooping low to guard his head from the occasional projections of rock, one hand running lightly along the side wall as he proceeded, for in here the darkness was intense, and seemed almost palpa-

> He parted a thick screen of vines and bushes similar to the curtain through which he had made his way on the opposite side, and stepped immediately out into the clear moonlight.

> He cast a swift, searching glance about him, fear of discovering danger or aught to be avoided, since he made no effort to hide his own movements. He strode rapidly across the bare space, plunging into a mass of stunted timber and shrubbery, near the center of which, in an artificial glade, was a low, rude hut of logs, heavily thatched with brush and dry grass.

> "Who comes?" uttered a deep, stern voice, followed by a sharp, significant double click. Red-foot uttered a peculiar cry, following it

> with the words: "Save your cartridge, Old John, for better

> game!" "You fool!" came an angry, yet relieved, retort. "Some night you'll make a sign too late!

Will you never learn that—"

"Oh, give us a rest, won't you?" growled Red-foot, using the current slang with surpris ing fluency for one of his color. "Suppose you do blow a tunnel through a fellow? That would be the end of my trouble, while you'd have to study over the problem of how to dispose of the remains with the least trouble to your lazy

bones." Old John, as Red-foot called him, gave a surly growl as the younger man brushed past him and crossed the threshold.

"Lazy-bones!" he grumbled, with a vicious glitter in his black eyes, as he followed after. "Not so lazy but that they're capable of lick-

ing a little more respect into your carcass, boy!" "I've heard that same threat before," sneered Red-foot, turning with a hand upon the knife at his waist, "and I give back the same answer, Blow for blow, and I'm betting long odds my blade gets there quicker than your fist!"

For a single instant it seemed as though Old John was about to put this to the test. Eye met eye, and it would have been a difficult matter to decide which pair sparkled the most viciously. Only for a single breath, however. Then the old man cowered, his stern tones dropping to a miserable whine.

"He wants to murder his own daddy! The boy I've nursed, and petted, and slaved, and sinned for! The boy I've made what he is-"

"Something to be proud of, isn't it?" sneeringly interposed Red-foot, dropping his bundle and flinging out his bare arms, revealing his almost filthy rags by the red light of the cheerful fire. "Something to be thankful for, eh? Shall I go down on my hunkers and call the choicest blessings of Heaven down upon your pious head for making me-what? An outcast! A vagabond! A filthy red-skin dog!"

Red-foot had shown more than one curious trait that night, but this was the strangest one of all. Greatly as be had surprised Basil Brock by his swift changes, this would have opened the eyes of the young rancher even more widely than all the rest combined. Truly, for a

full-blooded red-skin as he laid claim to being,

Red-foot was a queer compound.

Old John cowered before the scornful youth, his bent form becoming still more bowed as he shuffled sideways to the wall of the hut, where he cautiously deposited his repeating-rifle, dropping a tanned buffalo-bide before it. And his doleful whine grew even more pronounced as he ventured a subdued reply:

"Am I all to blame? Must I shoulder all the fault? Then it's time to put an end to all

this-"

"Where's that girl?" interrupted Red-foot, casting a swift glance around the hut, taking an involuntary step toward the swinging screen of skins that divided off a portion of the one room. "I'm hungry as a dog! Where's Meta?"

Even as the name passed his lips, the curtain of skins parted near the center, and a graceful form appeared—that of the Indian girl who warned Laughing Leo of the poisoned waters. "Meta is here, brother," she said, gently.

"I'm hungry, and too tired to wait on my-

Blunt enough the words, but uttered in a vastly different tone of voice from that used toward Old John. And Red-foot seemed more than half ashamed to make the demand. Truly, he was a curious Indian.

For that matter, a curious lot, from Old John to Red-foot, yet none who knew them had the slightest doubt as to their being pure-blood Indians in all save a certain degree of education

and acquired manners.

After all, it was not so strange, so many curious changes have taken place among the Indians of latter days. Among them may be found well-read men, but who are none the less perfect savages. Education is not all. A few years spent in civilized society, in studying, in mental training, does not always transform an Indian into a pale-face. The instincts of his people remain, and are most certain to break out sooner or later. And a "backsliding" Indian is ever the worst of all Indians. He must make amends for what he has suffered while under restraint. And thus it was with Old John and his little family, so those who knew them best were free to aver.

Very Indian-like were both the men, now. They squatted on the bare floor, smoking their pipes in silent gravity, gazing at vacancy, while Meta-lupa-startling contrast to them both in looks and garb and neatness!-busied herself in cooking meat for the young savage.

Red-foot has already been described with sufficient distinctness for the minor part he is to play in this drama, but a few words may be devoted to Old John, his self-admitted father.

Less ragged, less dirty, more presentable in every respect save that of youth and strength and physical comeliness than his worthy offspring, Old John was yet anything but a reputable looking fellow.

His frame was large, and clearly had once been possessed of no mean degree of power. but it was so bowed as to seem absolutely deformed. He was emaciated to a marvelous degree, his dusky skin lying in hideous wrinkles over his bones, the snake-like sinews crawling and writhing with each movement of his limbs, adding to his general repulsiveness. There was little resemblance in his form or features to either of his children.

His face looked that of the pure Indian: high cheek-bones, narrow, receding forehead, retreating chin, yet broad and square; a thin nose, curved like the beak of a hawk, with flexible nostrils, deep-set eyes, jetty black and still brilliant with the peculiar sparkle of a snake.

An uncanny-looking creature was Old John, by which name alone he was known to the white inhabitants of the range. And he bore a reputation to the full as uncanny, though there was nothing purely evil in this reputation.

He was said to be marvelously skilled in herbs and roots, and many a broad white dollar passed into his skinny palm from cowboy and herder in exchange for mysterious compounds or salves for hurts and cuts and bruises. Nostrums that were said to effect all that the old "medicineman" claimed for them, too.

Few save those who scught him had ever met with Old John, for he rarely left his secluded retreat where he had dwelt for no one seemed able to say how many years. Those longest on the range were wont to declare that Old John was a still older residenter than they could lay claim to being.

More was known of his little family, however. Something of the habits of his son has already been said. And the fame of his daughter, Metalupa, was even wider spread, though of quite a different sort.

Her beauty, truly remarkable for an Indian, among whom it is extremely exceptional to meet with a girl who would be deemed even moderately good-looking were her skin white, despite the numerous tales wherein "lovely maidens" and "beautiful princesses" abound. was doubly interesting for that very reason. And more than one susceptible cowboy had indulged in blissful dreams of winning and wearing "Old John's girl," only to meet with sore defeat and humiliation. Not only at the hands of Meta-lupa herself, but from Old John and

even Red-foot. And in such cases the peculiar reputation which the "medicine-man" had won among the somewhat superstitious cowboys, now stood them in good stead. There might be too much danger-not from bullet or steel, though the family ever appeared ready to resort to these stern arguments in case of need-but one who could work such marvelous cures might well effect their opposite, if driven to the wall. And so Meta-lupa remained ungathered from the parent stem. So she escaped being carried off Lochinvar fashion by some wild and woolly cowboy.

With silent deftness Meta-lupa completed her task, placing the hot and appetizing meat before her brother, who gave a truly Indian grunt as he set about devouring the steaks.

The girl stood in silence beside him for a few moments, then bent and gently touched her warm, red lips to his forehead. She performed the same action as she passed over to Old John's side, then asked:

"Is there anything more for me to do? If not, I will go."

Red-foot glanced up with an ugly sneer on his thin lips. "This tepee is not good enough for you to

sleep in, eh? Or is it those who share it with you, Meta-lupa?"

"Neither, brother," was the quiet reply. "I will remain here, if you prefer."

"Go to your own lodge if you like it better. Why should I prefer your stopping here? Go-I may call and see you, though; I have something to show you."

Meta-lupa hesitated for a brief space, then, as nothing further was said, she silently turned

and left the hut.

Old John rose to his feet and stepped silently to the door, opening it just wide enough to afford him a glimpse of the maiden moving across the glade in the direction of the little hut which she had built with her own hands, and where she nearly always passed the night, of recent times. As though satisfied, the old red-skin closed the door and resumed his seat and pipe. But as soon as Red-foot showed signs of having eaten his fill, Old John grunted:

"Well?" Red-foot seemed in a much better humor since eating, for he gave a light laugh as he refilled his pipe, then said:

"It is well, from all I could learn."

"Then you-eh?"

than you could guess if you spent a year in trying," chuckled the red-skin, nodding his head in savage glee.

Old John frowned darkly, and looked far

from being at ease.

"It's risky-too risky!" he growled, with a vicious snap of his still sound teeth. "There are many besides the hated one who drink at the spring! It is a blind trap, and may catch the wrong bird. If so-and there is a close hunt -who so likely to be looked at with suspicion as Old John, with his herbs and powders? You are a fool, boy! The risk is worth much more gold than that man pays you!"

Red-foot laughed lightly as he flung out one

hand with a gesture of contempt.

"Is it that you are brooding over? Bah! a mere side issue, hardly worth remembering!" "When it puts a rope around our necks--"

"There'll be plenty who will come forward to throw it off again, let me whisper in your shell-like ear, old man!" laughed Red-foot, with real or admirably assumed carelessness. "Unless the job is completed by this, it will come to nothing. I go in the morning to take away all that can tell tales."

"Make sure of the little sack, boy-make sure of that, no matter what you do about the other!" eagerly muttered Old John. "Let it remain until it all melts and runs away, if you like! We know enough to keep from touching the water, and as for the whites-curse them! who cares for what comes to their lips? Not Old John!"

"Nor I," was the prompt acquiescence of the younger rascal. "But such are my orders, and when a man pays so royally, be sure I'll keep to the very letter of the bargain-until I see a chance for raising the stake in another quar-

"Little enough-little enough for the risk!"

growled Old John.

"But that's only one job, you understand," laughed Red-foot, as he stretched himself lazily before the fire. "I've done another this day that has paid me tenfold!"

"In gold-good gold, boy?" muttered Old John, his snake-like eyes glowing avariciously

as he leaned toward his hopeful son.

Red-foot took a handful of gold coin from his rags, and tossed it with an air of lordly carelessness toward bis father. With mumbling cries the old rascal scrambled after the coins. Red-foot laughing with insolent scorn the while. Where the gold went to, only Old John could have told, but his hands were empty when he resumed his former position.

And then Red-foot tersely told him what he had accomplished that day, concealing nothing save the name of the man who hired him to do

the dastardly deed.

"Even that I'll tell you after to-morrow passes," he added. "Then even you, who stick as close to this den as a bear to his hole in midwinter, will be able to point out the man who pours out gold like water in order to be revenged on those he hates. Even you would be smart enough to read what is a riddle as yet."

"But the risk—think of that, boy!" uneasily muttered the old red-skin, a nervous shiver shaking his bony frame as he cast a look over one shoulder. "All this will cause talk. And wild guesses. And maybe there will be those who will turn their eyes in this direction for the hand that did the work!"

"Let them look—who cares?" sulkily.

"I care!" was the sharp retort. "And if the rope is put about my old neck through your rash acts-well, time enough for threats!"

Old John stopped short, with a wholesome fear of his savage cub. Red-foot was gazing intently into his face with anything but filial love in his glittering eyes. And there was an undercurrent of menace in his voice, rather than in his words as he spoke again:

"It is time you buried that ancient bugbear, old man. It used to frighten me, but that was when my years were less and my love for the man who called me son much greater than now. Then I was content to follow your lead, and what has it brought me to? This!" flinging out his arms and glancing over his ragged attire.

"Better rags with a sound neck, than—" "The rags are mine, the threatened neck yours!' with a hard laugh. "Still, you are my father—or so you say, and—"

"Do you dare doubt that?" fiercely cried Old

John. "I only wish I could," with a mock sigh. "I'd pick out a heap more respectable father if I had another choice. But let that go. I wanted to talk business, and here it is—sharp and sweet!

"Down there," with a careless wave of one hand in the direction of the main ranches, "they look upon me as an idle, drunken, stupid vagabond. They think I am blind as a rattler in August to all that hasn't a flavor of bad whisky about it! But for all that, I've used my eyes and ears and wits until-listen, old man!

"You know how much stock-stealing and raiding there has been going on in this section ever since the land began to fill up with cattle and horses. You may have even suspected what I now know; that there is a strong and regularly organized band of raiders, who go to work sys-"Did the work set me to do, and even more | tematically and do their business up to the handle. And drunken dog as they call me, I can put my hand on the chief of the band at an hour's notice!"

> Old John gave a grunt, but this declaration interested him much less than Red-foot had car-

culated. With a scowl he added:

"Serve you right if I dropped the matter right here, but I'll do better. I'll tell you that if there is any ugly row kicked up about my work of to-day, and there comes any troublesome looks in this direction, I can make all safe—I can wipe out the old secret which has troubled you for so many years, by selling my discovery to the proper authorities. They will pay an even longer price than that for the information I can give them. Ha! that stirs your cold blood, does it?" with a sarcastic laugh as Old John sprung to his feet, strong emotion imprinted upon his withered visage.

"You think—you will do this for me, boy?" he muttered, his voice husky and choked, something like tears dimming his eyes, incredible as that may seem—incredible as it did seem to Red-foot, who stared at him in utter amaze.

"Why not?" he laughed, casting off this strange feeling, briefly shaking the hands of the old man, then dropping them in turn to his precious bundle, breaking the string and unrolling his gay garments. "Why not? since I am going to open up a new and better life for myself—and here is the beginning!"

Old John glanced at the gay garments, then resumed his seat, smoking with nervous haste that betraved how deeply his emotions had been stirred. But Red-foot paid little attention to him, seeming like a boy with his first pair of boots as he turned the gay clothes over and over under the light of the fire.

"Of course you don't know much about such things-if you ever did, you've for otten them now. But I'm young-young and handsome enough, helped by these fine feathers, to win even a look of admiration from her glorious eyes! And Meta will understand me better than you can—that's why I told her I'd drop in to see her before turning in for a good long snooze!"

While uttering these words, Red-foot was gingerly rolling up the garments again, and with them hugged to his breast-much as a lover might hug a sweetheart—he left the cabin and strode over to the little hut where he found Meta-lupa.

Calm enough to all outward seeming, but with a heart that fluttered violently beneath her dress, and a pulse that beat high with mingled dread and anxiety; for she had barely succeeded in reaching her hut in time to avoid being espied by the keen eyes of her brother.

Proudly enough Red-foot displayed his treasures to Meta-lupa, fortunately so deeply interested in them that he failed to note her agitation, her unsteady tongue. And as he held the gay garments up so as to display their charms to the greatest advantage, he exclaimed:

"Are they not gay? Gay and fine enough to

go courting in, Meta?" "Courting-you?" she ejaculated in un-

maiden?"

feigned surprise. "Why not?" with a sudden frown, as he began refolding the clothes. "My skin is red, but what of that? Am I so hideous? Am I old and deformed? Am I a thing to shock the eyes of a

"You are handsome as the best, brother," was the quick response. "And the girl you go to see, should be proud-very proud! Who is it, brother? May I know her name?"

If not genuine, this interest was admirably counterfeited, and it brought smiles back to the face of the red-skin dandy-that-was-to-be.

"Time enough, Meta-time enough when I ask you to go with me to see for yourself how well and proudly I have chosen. It will not be long to wait, little one," with a laugh that was soft and even musical. "To-morrow I wear these clothes for the first time. To-morrow night I will know whether to tell you her name or to curse the stars that withess my disappointment!"

Without waiting for her reply, Red-foot turned and left the hut, striding back to where Old John was waiting his return to question him more closely concerning the long-dead hopes

his words had wakened.

And Meta-lupa sat before her dying fire, her face hidden in her hands, thinking-thinking!

She had overheard all that passed between her father and brother in the other hut. She knew that Red-foot had, urged on by the gold of some bitter enemy, dealt still another blow at Laughing Leo. And-

"I'll do it!" she suddenly exclaimed, lifting her head, her dark eyes flashing with resolution. "I'll do it—let the cost be what it may! I'll do it—though they kill me after!"

CHAPTER XI.

WHEREIN CICERO GETTETH PINCHED.

"EH? What? Where?"

The voice of Cicero Boggs, not particularly eloquent, but wonderfully comprehensive, secing there was wonder, doubt and disgust enough in each explosive word to form an entire volume of ordinary emotion.

From a seeming dead man, the lawyer's clerk was suddenly transformed into one living and conscious. The closed lids opened, and the greenish-gray eyes swept wonderingly over the leafy canopy above them, dimly visible by the light of the moon sifting through the tree-tops. Then the head in which those eyes were set, lifted from the cool earth with spasmodic energy, rolling from side to side as its owner stared at the grim, dark figures by whom he was surrounded.

Only for a moment. His head dropped back with a sullen thump, his eyes closed, and a groan

of disgust came from his lips.

"Boggs, you're an ass—an idiot—a fool for the lack of sense! I always suspected it, but now I know it! Somebody fetch a grasshopper to kick my brains out!"

"Are you so anxious to die as all that comes to?" a clear, mellow voice uttered close beside the groaning, lamenting, utterly demoralized law clerk. "If so-wouldn't this serve your purpose quite as well as the gay and festive hopper-de-grass?"

Cicero Boggs shrunk from the cold muzzle of a revolver as it significantly touched his temple, his eyes flying open and darting a wondering glance into the face of the speaker. And there was nothing feigned in the surprise that filled his voice as he muttered:

"Drunk, dreaming or still walking in my sleep! The voice of the bewitching Queen Sate, but the face of a— Eh? Good Lord!"

Handsome enough the face that bent so closely over him, but it was just as surely that of a man as that the voice was marvelously like that of Sarah Anne McAvoy. And there was little of the woman in the vicious force with which this man pressed his weapon against the shrinking, shivering skin.

"Yelp out loud, you sneaking spy, and off goes the roof of your cabeza! How many more of your sort goes creeping around here? Speak quick and clear, but not too loud-you know what that means!"

"There's only one of me-and I wish there wasn't so many by one!" faintly gasped Cicero Boggs, shivering like a mass of calves'-foot jelly.

"Don't- Oh, Lord! Good-by, Maggie! Tell the babies-" The man who was gifted with the voice of Queen Sate rose erect, and with one foot he sharply tapped the groaning, moaning, lament-

ing lawyer's clerk across the lips. "Drop that howling, you bloodhound. know you-I know what brought you here-and I can tell you precisely how this little trip of yours is going to end, too! Shall I?"

"In breaking my neck if I can't succeed in breaking myself of this abominable habit!" spluttered Cicero Boggs, his self-indignation seeming to get the better of his fears. "It is

shameful! Atrocious! It is-did you ever walk in your sleep?" abruptly appealing to the handsome young man whose voice so marvelously resembled that of Miss McAvoy.

"That's too thin, my covey!" with a hard

cruel laugh of scorn.

"Eh? Too- What brought me out here at this dead hour of night? Why ain't I in my bed, soundly- To think! And I the father of a young and interesting family!" he groaned, closing his eyes as though with the vain hope of shutting out his own shame and disgrace.

A strong hand grasped him by the collar, jerking him to a sitting posture, dragging him bodily back a pace or two until the trunk of a tree held him in a half-erect posture when that hand released him. And there was a second figure beside the man with the same voice as Queen Sate; that of a heavy-set man with low brows and a general hang-dog appearance.

"Speak to this moaning innocent, Double-six, and tell him just how you happened to make

his acquaintance a bit ago."

"Was on the watch, as you know, boss," growled the stunted Hercules. "See'd somebody comin' this way. Knowed ef he wasn't a fri'nd he meant mischief. Watched him. Ketched him creepin' up nigh this, es ef to take in what was goin' on. Jumped the critter an' knocked him silly. Thar!"

"You can swear that he was spying on us?"

"Double over, boss!"

"And I can take oath he is not nor ever was one of us. Putting this and that together, it's easy enough to guess just what the rascal is: one of those cursed detectives, come up here to fatten on the lives of honester men! But we'll read him a lesson such-"

Cicero Boggs gave a hollow groan, and judging from his tones he was the most miserable

creature in all the range.

"Isn't this lesson enough?" he muttered, trying to bring his tigh ly bound hands into view. "Isn't it bad enough to be a somnambulist—to go trolloping all over the country at the deadest hour of night, uot knowing whether you are dressed for company or not? Isn't that punishment enough? Let alone getting a back caved in and a head put on one big as a mountain? Good land o' liberty-yas!"

"Is that your defense, Wirt Dalton?" sharp-

ly demanded the other.

Another groan from Cicero Boggs, through

which ran a vein of angry despair.

"You've got a touch of the same disease, have you? Confound Wirt Dalton! I'll sue him | cal experience you can not be sure. Well, unless for slander! I'll get an order from court commanding him to show cause why he shouldn't be compelled to paint his face red, blue, green or yellow-anything to keep him from looking like me-a husband and a father with-eh?" "You are not Wirt Dalton, then?"

Cicero Boggs suddenly calmed his hot indig-

nation, uttering quietly:

"You don't happen to have such a thing as

a Bible about you?"

There came the sound of a smothered laugh from out the shadows, and the chief himself seemed not a little taken aback by this query. Even Cicero Boggs, now that the words had crossed his lips, seemed to recognize the awkwardness of his own question, for he hastily added:

"Don't apologize-I'm apt to forget mine, at times. I only wanted to make affidavit, but my

word is as good as my oath, and-"

"No one present doubts that assertion in the least," laughed the man with the voice of Queen Sate. "I, for one, would as soon take one as the other, while neither is worth more than both put together! Can you unriddle me that riddle, dear fellow?"

"Must I try?" feebly muttered the captive. There was no answer from the man who was gifted with the voice of Queen Sate. He turned away from his captive and uttered a few words to his fellows-half a dozen in number, as Cicero Boggs could now see.

But the worthy clerk gave them only a passing glance as they bustled about gathering material for building a fire. His gaze followed this man with the voice of Queen Sate. And

more than the voice, too! In hight, in weight, in every outward semblance, unless it was his face, the resemblance was startling-was precisely what Queen Sate might have been had she donned masculine gar-

ments. Was it Queen Sate? Was it the Belle of the Range, after all, whom he had tracked from the

Emerald Ranch?

These questions troubled Cicero Boggs just

then, even more than the peril which undeniably threatened himself.

The fire was kindled only a few feet in advance of where the captive was sitting, and the red glow soon began to render all objects distinctly visible. And as the man whom he still suspected was a woman in disguise fairly faced this glow, Cicero Boggs keenly scanned his face and figure. The result was contrary to his expectations. Despite that marvelous resemblance as to voice and shape, he knew now that his suspicions were without foundation.

A handsome face, barring the marks of dissipation and evil passions, but a face that, when

scanned as closely as now, bore not the most remote resemblance to the beautiful Queen Sate.

His own face was being just as closely examined, and the chief of the outlaws-for such they surely must be-seemed far better pleased with the result than Cicero Boggs. At least, there was a cold smile upon his evilly-handsome countenance as he spoke:

"So! you still deny that you are Wirt Dalton, detective, from the Chicago branch of Pinker-

ton's Agency?"

"Twice over, if that will convince you any the sooner," was the prompt response.

The chief frowned darkly. There was a promptitude about this answer that seemed to displease him. No doubt he would have preferred something more like the fear and despair which had until now marked the speech and manner of his captive.

"What brought you out here to-night, unless to spy upon our movements? And why should you want to spy on us, unless you are one of

those infernal hunters of blood?"

Cicero Boggs hesitated for an instant, a halfsmile coming into his face as he muttered: "After all, why should I deny what is more of a misfortune than a fault or disgrace? I'm

a-sleep-walker, sir!" The chief flung out one hand with an impa-

tient gesture, and his tones had little music in them as he sharply uttered:

"You still stick to that ridiculous trick?" "It's worse than ridiculous—it's horrible!" groaned Cicero, mentally wringing his hands, since his bonds prevented him from doing so physically. "Think of it, my dear fellow-just try to put yourself in my place for a single moment? Get excited from any cause: take a single glass beyond your regular measure; anything or everything out of the common routine, and—there you are! Walking out of secondstory windows! Parading the most populous streets if you happen to be in the city--and that, more than likely, in frightfully abbreviated costume! Good heavens, sir! it almost drives me distracted just to think of it! For all of this, and a thousand times more, have I experienced in my wretched career!"

"Did you ever wake up to find a tight noose about your neck, and the rope so short that

your feet couldn't touch the ground?" "Eh? why, that would be hanging!" spluttered

poor Cicero.

"You think so, but unless you've had practiyou drop this nonsense, you'll have just that same practical experience, my fine fellow!"

This was no jest. There was a vicious earnest in every tone, in every gleam and glitter of those dar: eyes. And Cicero Boggs was keen enough to realize this without further argumene.

A sickly smile crept into his own face, and there was just a tinge of awkwardness in his confestion:

"I can't make you swallow all that, eh?"

"Not this evening!"

"Yet it is all true—I mean about my being an occasional sleep-walker. If you've got a-I mean, I'm ready to make affidavit to that effect!"

"And you were walking in your sleep when you followed me from the Emerald Ranch to this place? You were walking in your sleep when you crept up to eavesdrop our conversation? Don't answer in a hurry, my dear fellow. Take your time. The rope is not quite ready yet!"

Cicero Boggs shivered a little as he listened. Truly this was a decidedly disagreeable acquaint-

ance! "What did she-Miss McAvoy, I mean-" A swift motion, and a hand struck sharply across his lips, cutting his speech short. Hard

and menacing came the words: "No names, you bloodhound! Stick to your text, or up a tree you go, so quick it will make

your head swim!"

"I meant no disrespect to-to anybody," quietly uttered Cicero Boggs. "You wanted to learn the truth, and I can't tell it all without at least alluding to—the person whose name you don't like to hear."

"So much the worse for you, then," was the cold, uncompromising retort. "You'll hang, anyway, but you'll hang all the sooner if your lips profane the name of that lady. You comprehend?"

"That it's a mighty little show you're giving me-yes," and his smile became very faint and

ghost-like indeed. "How much more show would you have given us-those poor devils whom you were sent up here to trap and drag to the gallows?" fiercely hissed the chief, while surly Double-six broke in with:

"Not a durned show, Pritty Poll! Le's yank him up nigher Heaven then he'll ever git ag'in! Tit fer tat—an' he goes out fu'st!"

Pretty Poll seemed something of a contradictory character, judging from the sharpness with which he turned upon Double-six, growling:

"It isn't your put, old man! When I say hang it is time enough for you to begin pulling on the rope!"

Double-six fell back with a low, sullen growl, but without further questioning the right of Pretty Poll to decide on the fate of their captive. Clearly, this man who occasionally used the voice of Queen Sate, was a man of authority among his fellows.

"You admit, then, that you were wide awake when you followed me from the Emerald Ranch?" said Pretty Poll, turning to the prisoner.

"If you shake the rope in my face as a penalty, I suppose I must," slowly responded the prisoner, but with a wry face.

"If the rope wasn't there would you dare deny

"Why shouldn't I, when it is the simple truth?" That I followed after you, if you came from the ranch, is highly probable, since you got here before me; but that is the sum and extent of my offending."

"You were caught listening to our talk." "And terribly afraid some of you would hear my shivering and jump on my back-just as that gentle stranger did," with a forced smile. "But all the time I was wishing to gracious you'd. move on-or that I could pucker up courageenough to make an effort to steal away."

"Our talk frightened you, then?" with an ugly

sneer.

"Indeed it did," with unexpected frankness. "And why not? When I heard you talking of slitting my throat—this very identical throat, mind you!" and Cicero Boggs tenderly worked. the Adam's apple therein.

"We were talking of Wirt Dalton, and you deny being that man! How do you reconcile the

two?" sharply asked Pretty Poll.

"I knew you were mistaken, but what good would that do me if you slit my throat for that of Mr. Dalton without stopping to discover the error? You said that I-he-was in the ranch yonder. That somebody knew I was a detective. And so-you see?"

"That you are mighty fond of beating around the bush, making a terrible lot of noise without saying anything! Come! if you are not Wirt-Dalton, what are you doing in these parts? Why have you acted so suspiciously-stealing out of the house at midnight, on foot, dogging us here?

Answer this, if you can!" "My name is Cicero Boggs. I am a clerk in the employ of a firm in Minneapolis, lawyers, Messrs. Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale. They are seeking for a man who disappeared from sight years ago-if you wish I can probably recall just the date of his last appearance on record."

"Never mind the details. Go on with your cock-and-bull story! Then will come my turn." "This man, Melchoir Parkindale, has fallen heir to a vast sum of money, left to him by a relative in England. Messrs. Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale learned of this fact, and took hold of the case on speculation, knowing that success meant a big fee. They fancied some trace of Melchoir Parkindale might be found up in these parts, and they sent me off, post-haste, to investigate the matter."

"A smooth story, but it will hardly save your

neck, Mr. Dalton!"

"I've got papers in my effects at the ranch. which will prove all I state, if you care to go there to inspect them, sir."

"And have that wild Irishman send a handful of buckshot through my wardrobe? No, thank you! It's much simpler to believe you a

"But hardly as satisfactory to me, if I may venture to say it," muttered Cicero Boggs, with

a faint, shivering laugh. "You don't count. Time is mighty near up, and there isn't much longer for you to spin the

rest of your ingenious yarn. Still-go on and we'll see where you fetch up." There was precious slight consolation in this. but Cicero Boggs grew more cool and composed the greater the peril that confronted him, and

made the most of the time allotted him.

Being careful to mention no names. yet telling his story after a fashion that enabled his captor to readily follow his meaning, he told of his accident, of the adventure with the half-wild cattle, and his deliverance by Queen Sate and Basil Brock. Without disguise he admitted how the Belle of the Range charged him with being Wirt Dalton, his sole reservation being a concealment of her advice for him to seek his safety in a speedy flight. Of course he knew that Pretty Roll, in learning the rest must also have learnt this, but he shrewdly calculated it could do him no harm to show a desire to shield the lady as much as possible under the circumstances.

"You see, though I spoke up mighty bold, and declared that I would leave the country only after attending the meeting to-morrow, all the time I was resolved on running out of danger by the shortest route," he frankly admitted without a blush. "I waited until all in the house was still, and I believed everybody but myself was sleeping soundly. And then-I opened my window and jumped out, hunting up the first bit of cover to shut off view from the house, going from that to the next bit of timber, and finally coming here, little suspecting that the place was already occupied, until too late to

back out." "You left everything behind you-even to

your horse? You expect us to swallow all that?"

"The papers were only copies, and even should they fall into the hands of those who knew Melchoir Parkindale or his heirs, what harm? The discovery would come through the firm, all the same, and as they hold the original papers, nothing could be done without their agency. The horse? Lame-too lame for a man to trust to who's in a terrible hurry to get out of the wilderness. And as for taking up with the kind offer-I mean," with a slight stammer, as | can't help it-good Lord!" he caught himself, "as for borrowing a mount -excuse me! It was bad enough to be charged with being a detective, let alone running the risk of being picked up as a horse-thief!"

As Cicero Boggs briskly told his story, with all the air of one who is sticking closely to the truth, the face of his captor grew a little less hard, though still cold and suspicious. And as the clerk came to an end, he slowly uttered:

"That sounds all right. It may possibly be the truth. If you really are what you cliam, it would be hard to hang you for a human bloodhound. Yet I've sworn-reckon I'll have to stretch your neck!"

"Give a poor devil a show, won't you?" eagerly ejaculated Cicero Boggs catching at a straw. "Give me time and a chance to prove I'm just precisely what I claim to be! You'll never regret it, sir!"

Pretty Poll turned away and beckoned his men to follow. They appeared to be consulting over the matter, and, as may well be imagined, the prisoner watched them with breathless interest.

He drew a long breath of relief as he saw the men preparing their norses as if for the road, but it was not until Pretty Poll spoke again that he felt really reprieved.

"Somehow I half believe you are telling a straight story, despite the fact of your face so closely resembling that of Wirt Dalton. I won't hang you until I've settled every doubt as to

Cicero Boggs began to thank him volubly, only

to be cut short: "Spare your breath until you've got fairly out of the noose, my fine fellow, and that is not vet. I know one who can pronounce positively as to Wirt Dalton, and I'll fetch him to see you before meny more hours. Until then-watch him closely, lads, and if he tries to come any of his tricks, lay him out cold as a wedge in midwinter!"

Without another word, Pretty Poll led his horse through the undergrowth and disappeared from view. Cicero Boggs was lifted into a saddle and firmly bound there by means of a lariat. Then Double-six took the rein and led the horse through the timber, accompanied by a man who had answered to the name of Johnson.

The open ground was soon reached, but Cicero Boggs vainly looked around in quest of Pretty

Poll and the remainder of the party. "None o' that, cuss ye!" grated Double-six, abruptly drawing rein as he sat behind the captive. "Though you'll hang, dead sure, I ain't gwine to have you marking out the trail sofashion! Len' a han', will you, Johnson? We've got to blind this chicken."

A heavy bandage was placed over the prisoner's eyes, and then the ride was resumed at a

rapid pace. For some time Cicero Boggs remained silent, seemingly cowed by the brutal jests which the two men bandied back and forth with their helpless charge for a butt, but finally he ven-

tured: "It's mighty tough, but I'll try to grin and bear it, if you'll promise me one thing, gentle-

"What's that?" grinned Johnson. "Want us

men "

to set ye loose?" "I'll give you a sight draft for a thousand dollars on the firm if you'll do that-but you're only mocking me!" with a low sigh of resigna-

tion as the two men broke into a coarse laugh. 'em out in hard, yellow gold," grinned Johnson. "Shorter than that wouldn't pay fer the mighty tall travelin' we'd hev to do to get out o' range of the boss-eh, Double-six?"

"Bet ver boots!" grunted the squat ruffian. Cicero Boggs heaved a sigh as he resigned that new-born hope. Truly, he was paying dear for his ill-tim d curiosity.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEREIN CICERO LOOMETH UP, BIG! For some time he maintained silence, but then he was seized with a strange, spasmodic sort of jerking that seemed wholly involuntary on his part. Double-six uttered a warning growl.

"Stiddy be jerks, ye durned critter! Think I hain't got nothin' better fer to do then to keep you from goin' flippy-te-flop all over seventeen counties an' a section? Ef they's a prickly-p'ar atween ye an' the saddle, play it was a quishion an' keep on plavin' ontel we git thar, durn ye!"

"Tnat's what I-wanted to-speak about!" panted Cicero Boggs, the words coming in jerks as spasmodic as the shocks with which his hampered form was agitated.

Double-six, who rode with arms extended on each side of his prisoner, grasping the reins, felt the muscles of his charge grow stiff and rigid

between those peculiar shocks, and instantly took alarm.

"All eyes open thar, pard! Chug him fer keeps ef he makes a break! Stiddy, durn ye!" with a vicious snarl so close to the ear of the afflicted man that Cicero Boggs gave vent to a gasping howl of dread.

"It ain't me! It's the—fits!" he panted, again stiffening in every muscle, like one who is desperately endeavoring to conquer himself. "It ain't because—I want to do it, but—because 1—

Dan Johnson was at his side, flourishing a particularly ugly-looking knife before his bandaged eyes, but correcting his error the next moment, causing the keen point to prick through the skin of the convulsed prisoner as he grated:

"Let up, or I'll sock 'er home good ten inches! An' be mi hty glad fer to git sech a good ixcuse,

"Water — whisky — anything, just so it's drink!" gasped Cicero Boggs, his voice hoarse and muffled with the tremendous restraint he was putting upon himself.

playin' bugs onto us, we'll git even fer the loss o' the whisky," hurriedly muttered Double-six, who was far from being as cool as his comrade; possibly because this strangely afflicted personage was, of necessity, clasped tightly within his arms.

"I'd ruther ram him chuck-up with this yer'!" growled the bloodthirsty ruffian riding alongside, reluctantly lowering his knife.

"Drink-choke off-fits!" The neck of a capacious whisky-flask was thrust between his shivering lips, and Cicero Boggs clung to it as a famished infant clings to its mother's breast. Clung to it, and pulled away just as vigorously, too, judging by the increased discontent of Dan Johnson, who finally

wrested the flask away by main force. "Praise Heaven, from whom all blessings-

Double-six jerked his horse up, slipping to the ground, though still retaining a firm grip on the reins. He gave a big sigh of relief, as he turned to his comrade, spluttering:

"Swap critters with a feller, pard? Ef notbe durned ef I ain't goin' to double-up with you, ruther then that jerky critter! Feels like they was snakes crawlin' an' a-creepin' all over meugh!"

"I'm sorry—awfully sorry, gents," faintly muttered Cicero Boggs, doubling over in the saddle like one with "the starch all taken out of him!" "I tried to warn you-that I'm subject to-fits of this sort, but-it came on sooner than -ugh!"

Dan Johnson rode alongside and deftly exchanged mounts, one skinny paw gripping the unfortunate lawyer's clerk by the back of his neck and straightening him up with a force that bade fair to snap his spinal marrow. And there was a vicious energy in his voice as he said:

"Them fits don't want to come back in a hurry, critter, fer we hain't got no mo' good whisky to waste on the like o' them! You hearn what Pritty Poll said: we was to lay ye out cold ef you tried to come any o' your p'izen tricks over us on the way. Waal, you ketch another one o' them fits, an' you'll lay down to take a nap that'll last from then to Gabri'l's horn! It's me that says it, an' I'm little ole gospel himself!"

Cicero Boggs faintly ventured to say that he had tried his level best to fight off the attack; that he had been just on the point of warning them of his peculiar liability to such attacks on extra-exciting occasions; and that he sincerely hoped the whisky they had so generously given him would enable him to escape any further attack.

"You won't never hev but one more, any. how!" grimly retorted Johnson, as the horses were put in forward motion again.

Whether the whisky or the threat had the "Not fer ten thousan' dollars-unless ye han' greatest influence, can only be conjectured, but his mate, their captive spoke up: certain it is that Cicero Boggs was troubled no further with his fits, while that night ride lasted.

> Double-six led the way at a rapid pace, closely followed by the big horse with its double load. They had long since left the level country, entering the broken land which lay to the north of the ranches, winding their way through rocky defiles and intricate passes, making so many turns and crooks that, despite his greenness, Cicero Boggs began to suspect that his captors were lengthening the ride much more than was strictly necessary simply in order to reach the destination they had in view from the first. Still, he kept his suspicions to himself. Of course he had long since lost all idea of the course they were following, since he had no use of his eyes to keep tally of all their turns and shiftings. And, somehow, he felt that his present guard was far more to be feared than Double-six, who would make two of him, so far as bulk was concerned. So, as the wisest course, the lawyer's clerk maintained silence despite his uneasiness, both bodily and mental.

> At length, after a long and wearisome ride, the cutlaws came to a halt, and Cicero Boggs was cast free from his borse and lowered to the ground. Dan Johnson kept a tight grip on one

arm, at the same time pricking him just over

the heart with the keen point of a knife. "Hay-foot, straw-foot, critter! Straight after your nose, an' don't make trip nur stumble onless you want me to measure the deepness of your palpitator with this bit o' good forgin'! It's nigh as wolfish fer bleed as I be--that's hungry clean from eend to eend!"

With remarkable aptitude for a tenderfoot, Cicero Boggs rightly interpreted the meaning of his captors, and stepping high to avoid any obstacle which might, by tripping him up, offer the bloodthirsty rascal a fair excuse for murdering him, he obeyed the impulse lent by that tight grip on his arm. And a few moments later he was half-lying, half-sitting on the floor of a small, rude hut.

Dan Johnson was squatting on his heels before him, looking like a human terrier on guard, showing his wolfish teeth as though nothing would give him greater pleasure than a chance to make them meet fairly in the flesh of the helpless being before him.

Double-six was busied kindling a fire in the "Choke him with a nozzle, pard, an' ef he's rude fireplace that took up nearly all of one end of the cabin. He had already attended to the horses, seeming willing enough to work as long as his comrade took all the care of their charge.

"Be durned ef I'd 'a' tackled the critter down yan-way ef I'd 'a' knowed he was sech a rickety kick-an'-flop es he's showed out sence," he growled, with a side-glance toward the captive. "S'pose 'nother of them cussed fits was to tackle him-what do, pardner?"

"Fill him up with whisky from your flask, pard," grimly grinned Dan Johnson. "Tit fertat, ye know! You made me let him suck my quart, an' I'm goin' to git even ef I see hafe a chaince!"

"Ef that's all, pard, fer glory-to-goodness!" don't coax him into a fit!" spluttered Double six, as he whipped out a huge flask and tossed it across to his mate. "Take the hull invoice—I'd. ruther not git even a smell at the cork then to hev him take 'nuther cut-up like them! I would so-double-over!"

Cicero Boggs was making good use of his eyes during this bit of by-play, and was not long in coming to a pretty accurate conclusion.

Double-six was a man who would fight anything that came in every-day shape, but he was strongly superstitious. With a frame that defied all physical ills, he was too ignorant to comprehend such spells as had assailed the captive. They awed him more than a dozen armed men could have done.

On the other hand, Dan Johnson, though but a small man at best, and now but little better than a walking skeleton so far as flesh was concerned, was of altogether different metal. No superstition about him. Pure deviltry enough, however; malicious, cruel, heartless, without even a single redeeming trait.

This was discouraging, for Cicero Boggs had come to the conclusion that the sooner he got out of this hobble, the safer his life would be. Pretty Poll would hardly permit himself to be talked over twice in the same fashion, and Ciceroknew that if once decided a detective, his single. life would go but a little way toward satisfying the blood-thirst of these wholly desperate characters.

Yet, what hope was there for him? His hands were bound behind his back. Strong cords held. his ankles together. He was deprived of the belt of weapons which he had buckled about his. waist before leaving the Emerald Ranch on that disastrous investigation. His guards were armed to the teeth, and while both were plainly men who were used to strike first and argue. after, one was plainly eager for a fair excuse to slit his throat.

Truly, the prospect was anything but com-

fortable! But the lawyer's clerk was a man who placed much confidence in the power of smooth talking, and as Dan Johnson exchanged flasks with

"Indeed, gentlemen, I only took the whisky under protest! Not but that it was-remarkably good, and I'm a thousand times obliged for the kindness-"

"All the same, you cain't talk this cork out, so you mought as well give up tryin'," bluntly growled the human terrier.

"Indeed, sir, you misunderstand me," faintly smiled the captive, with a deprecatory nod of the head. "I'm not pleading for a drink, although my poor throat is well-nigh parched for a sup of water, and-"

"Ef that's all, they's hog-wash a-plenty. Git

him some, pard." Double-six caught up an old blanket that stood on a shelf in one corner of the hut, vanishing from sight through the open door, soon after returning with the vessel full of clear, cold water. He held the bucket so Cicero Boggs could drink from the brim, as there appeared to be a lack of cups about the place. And with a long sigh of grateful relief, the prisoner bowed his thanks, adding:

"That goes to the right spot-thanks, my

dear sir!" "What fer?" laughed Double-six as he backed away. "I'd water a hog ef I ketched him gruntin' fer drink an' they wasn't no swill.

handy. An' Pritty Poll said we was to hold you in good order fer-"

"Fer the rope, when he fetches a man with him that'll sw'ar you're one o' them cussed bloodhoun's," laughed Johnson, viciously.

"But I'm not a detective," plaintively ejaculated Cicero Boggs, shrinking as far from that ugly glare as the nature of the case would permit. "I'm simply a lawyer's clerk, sent up here to find a man named Melchoir Parkindale or his heirs."

"We've hearn all that afore, an' it won't hold water." bluntly interrupted Johnson, his little

eyes glittering snake-like.

"Talkin' don't hurt, pard," expostulated Double-six, whose good-nature seemed to increase in equal ratio with the viciousness of his mate. "It's too late to think of ketchin' a snooze afore grub-time, an' sech chirpin' as he kin do won't hurt nobody. Let him talk!"

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed Cicero Boggs, with a grateful bow toward the stunted Hercules. "If I am to be-if I am fated to die for the sins of another man, it will be some melancholy consolation to know that, sooner or later, the truth of my sad ending will make its way to the ears of my poor wife and her helpless babes! If you are married men-"

"Injun fashion, critter!" grinned Johnson, beginning to cut bits of tobacco from a huge plug, for the purpose of taking a smoke.

This seemed a damper on the piteous eagerness of the prisoner. His head drooped on his bosom, and for some little time he seemed buried in thought, doubtless brooding over his hapless fate. Double-six joined his mate in filling a pipe, and they squatted in silence, smoking with the indolent enjoyment which ever marks the true lover of the weed.

But Cicero Boggs knew that time was fleeing. rapidly, and that any hour might bring Pretty Poll with the man who could pronounce with certainty as to his being Wirt Dalton. Still, this did not give him even the ghost of comfort. For if so many had mistaken him for that hated detective, would not this other make the same

mistake?

It was only a forlorn hope, but he resolved to make the most of his opportunity, knowing from personal experience how much more amenable a man is with a pipe smoking beneath

his nostrils.

"Gentlemen, I hate to disturb you, but when a man finds himself in an ugly box like this, he loses all his politeness. Can't we come to some amicable arrangement? Can't I convince you that I'm the victim of a most luckless resemblance to another man? If I solemnly swear to you that I am not Wirt Dalton, nor any other like him—if I take the most solemn oath you can devise-"

"It ain't our say-so, critter," coldly interposed Double-six, while Dan Johnson grinned like a malicious terrier. "Even ef we knowed you wasn't a detective, we wouldn't dast to turn you loose afore the boss comes to decide on what's

your fate."

"Not if I made it well worth your while?"

persisted the captive.

"Not ef you could cram this cabin full to the roof o' yaller-boys, an' tell us to go in lemons!"

deliberately cut in Double-six.

As he attered the words he was leaning forward to pick up a coal of fire with which to relight his pipe, but a choking, gurgling sound checked him in this and drew his eyes toward the captive. A curse of mingled anger and awe hissed through his teeth as he saw a frightfully convulsed face, a form that was shivering and shaking violently.

"Nother fit!" he howled, springing to his

feet.

"Water-throw water-save-"

In choking gasps came the words from the lips of the sufferer, cut short as his figure suddenly straightened out, his feet sliding along the floor until his head fell with a heavy thump on the slabs.

From side to side he rolled, shaking and writhing after a horrible fashion, his breath coming in rapid gasps, and with a stertorous sound that was frightfully suggestive of suffocation.

With a howl of consternation Double-six made a dash for the pail of water, turning and hurling bucket and all in the direction of the sufferer. Fortunately it was aimed wildly, striking the wall and spilling only a portion of its contents over the purple face of the captive.

A gurgling cry of intense relief came from the lips of the afflicted man, for the cold water seemed to produce a magical effect. His head shot up and he assumed a sitting posture-but that was not all, nor what drew a snarl of won-

dering rage from Johnson.

Cicero Boggs had both hands free, and each hand as it swung swiftly around from behind his back, clasped a big-bored derringer! One instant, and then came a loud report, sending Dan Johnson over backward even as he started

to his feet, knife in hand! "Hands up, and empty, Double-six!" sternly cried the late captive, covering the stupetied Hercules with an aim that followed his slightest shrinking. "I don't want to kill you, but I'll have to do it if you hesitate another momen! Up with your hands, I repeat!"

Mechanically he was obeyed. As yet the sluggish wits of the outlaw failed to understand just what had happened. The change was so entire, so utterly unexpected.

"Turn to your right, Double-six. Keep your hands up, and bear in mind that I'll blow your roof off at the first sign of crookedness. Walk straight to the end wall. Closer, you rascal!" as the bewildered fellow obeyed like some automaton. "Until your toes touch the logs, and your lips can kiss them without sticking out further than your nose. And keep your hands up, will you?"

Like one in a dream, Double-six followed out these clear, sharp directions, pressing so close to the wall that a flea could scarcely have crept between his person and that barrier, his arms stretched at full length and his trembling hands

flattened out against the logs.

While speaking, Cicero Boggs was sliding himself over the floor toward the fallen outlaw, and while never turning his keen gaze from Double-six, he felt for and found the knife which had dropped from the unnerved fingers of the human terrier. With this he quickly cut the rope that secured his ankles, then rose to his

A single glance assured him that there was nothing more to be dreaded from Dan Johnson, at least for the present, and still keeping Double-six covered, warning him that certain death awaited his slightest movement until permission was given, he looked around until he discovered rope enough to serve his purpose.

"Now I'll relieve you in a few moments, my fine fellow," he said in cheery tones, as he stripped Double-six of his weapons, then stepped back toward the door, adding sharply: "About face, Double-six! Advance three paces, then lay down flat on your face! Lively, pard!"

"Don't butcher me, boss!" muttered the stunted Hercules, as he meekly obeyed. "It was me that spoke up fer ye when Dan wanted to-"

"That same speaking up saved me a cartridge and you a sore head, if nothing worse, pard,' laughed Cicero Boggs, kneeling beside the outlaw, drawing his hands behind his back, deftly securing them, then performing much the same operation with his feet. "Up to that time I'd made up my mind to kill you both like wolves. six. After it, I concluded to use milder means if I could bring it about without too great risk to myself. Let it be a lesson to you, old fellow; there's nothing lost by giving even a crippled dog a friendly pat on the head."

There was no reply to this philosophical speech, but Double-six ventured to turn his head far enough to steal a glance at his fallen comrade as Cicero Boggs turned to look after him. A low, careless laugh bubbled from the lips of the "tenderfoot," as he parted the thick mop of hair with which the skull of Dan Johnson was covered, probing a bleeding wound with the tip

of his finger.

"Just as deep as I intended," he chuckled, as he removed the belt of weapons from the desperado by unbuckling it, and then rolling the seeming corpse over by jerking one end of the belt. "I don't often make a wild shot, but you sprinkled me so freely that I wasn't sure but I saw double."

"Then he ain't—you didn't shoot to kill?" ven-

tured Double-six.

"What for?" with a short laugh. "Because he treated me like a dog, should I treat him the same? That may agree with your gospel, but it don't with mine, even though I be the bloodhound you call me."

Something like a groan came from the lips of Double-six.

"I'd ruther be shot dead in a minnit then run

off to taste the rope," he muttered sullenly. There was no reply to this, for Cicero Boggs detected signs of returning consciousness in the wounded desperado, and knowing that little

though the terrier was, he would bite deep if

given only half a chance, he lost no time in binding him hand and foot.

This done, he dragged both of his captives to the end of the hut furthest from the fireplace, propping each up in a corner, so they could hope for no aid in freeing themselves from his bonds. This completed to his satisfaction, he proceeded to make the restoration of Dan Johnson complete by sopping one of the hats in the little pools of water that still stood on the floor, then vigorously mopping the face and head of the wounded fellow. If this failed to greatly improve the good looks of the terrier, it at least brought him back to his senses.

Coolly ramming a portion of the wet hat into Dan's mouth as that opened to give vent to a

volley of furious oaths, Cicero quoth: "Don't try to be a bigger idiot than Dame Nature made you, Danny, for that's useless. can stop your mouth for good, just as I've put your paws out of mischief, but I don't care to make you any more uncomfortable than I have to-see?"

"I'll git even—I'll git even yit!" snarled the

terrier.

"When you do, let me know, please," with a light laugh, turning to Double-six. "You look a little more reasonable, pard. Can you tell me just where this shanty is located? I mean with sufficient clearness to enable a stranger to get

out of the wilderness without waiting for daylight."

"I don't think I kin, boss," muttered the

thoroughly subdued man.

"That's honest, anyway, and I'd rather believe it than any directions you might try to give me. I never did admire tramping about in a strange range under the light of the moon."

Careless though he seemed, Cicero Boggs caught and read aright the savage hope which sprung into the eyes of the human terrier.

"I trust not, for your sweet sake, Danny," he laughed, with a significant display of his derringers. "You're too precious to die like a fattened hog ready for the pork-barrel; but you're too utterly 'way off if you imagine for even an instant that I won't send you in advance to clear the dark trail for my weary footsteps in case any of your blood-drinkers should stray along this way in search of yours truly."

"I wouldn't mind, ef I knowed you was com

in' too!"

"How extremely well you must love me," mockingly; then, with an abrupt change of both face and voice: "unless you are really anxious to croak, Dan Johnson, you'll keep that bitter tongue a little closer behind your teeth. I don't care particularly about killing you, but I can do it without fear of losing a wink of sleep on that account. Shut up, now, and keep shut, or I'll salivate you for keeps!"

Not much like the "tenderfoot" they had captured! And Dan Johnson was not too big a tool to realize the difference. He was not yet ready to die; he wanted to live long enough to be assured of vengeance on this demon; and so he re-

lapsed into silence.

Cicero Boggs walked to the door and took a keen, searching glance around, then up at the star-studded heaven. Experience told him that it was yet an hour or two until dawn, and returning to the prisoners he spoke, mainly to Double-six:

"You fellows burnt your fingers when you picked me up, just as a good many others of the same sort has done. You were fools not to run me up a tree on the bare fact of my resemblance

to Wirt Dalton."

"Then the boss was right?" ventured Double-"Right or wrong—one or the other, be sure,"

was the laughing retort. "It makes little mat-

ter to you. And yet-listen: "I spoke the simple truth when I declared that I came to these parts on a mission; that I was looking for a party by the name of Melchoir Parkindale. There's big money in it if I can find him. You never heard of the man, have you?"

"I hain't," responded Double-six, but Dan Johnson was silent.

"I hardly expected any different answer, but my duty to the house made me ask the question. Now listen a bit further: I've got no particular grudge against you fellows, though I'm not saying that I haven't run more than one of your sort in out of the cold; but that is neither here nor there. Just now I'm hunting other game. You fellows can steal and run off all the stock in the territory for all I care. I'll not lift hand or voice against that, unless I receive orders to do so from headquarters; and that certainly will not be until after this little job is brought to a conclusion, one way or the other.

"Still," and his voice grew hard and metallic as he added: "I'm not a man to be crowded to the wall without doing some healthy kicking while that process is going on. If your fellows try to make me any more trouble, they'll find that, green as Cicero Boggs looks, he can handle

his tools with the most expert.

"I'm going to make tracks, just as soon as there is light enough to see how to untangle the knots you tied in your trail last night. I'll leave you here, for your mates to set free, unless some of them should happen to stumble on the shanty before day. In that case—well, I'll leave you company, though I won't guarantee them to prove very sociable. And as flying lullets are proverbially mighty careless, maybe you'd better put in the time praying for your mates to wait a bit longer before showing up. As for me -reckon I'll take a snooze!"

Turning away with a yawn, Cicero Beggs picked up the weapons taken from his prisoners, and dropping them close at hand, he stretched himself out before the cheerful fire, coolly com-

posing himself as if for a cat-nap. And before many minutes passed by, a gentle sound came from that direction. Actually the

fellow was snoring! And Dan Johnson ground a savage curse of fury between his teeth.

CHAPTER XIII. "PLAY OR PAY!"

BRIGHT, clear, everything that the heart could wish for, dawned the day set for the meeting of the racers representing the Triangle and B. B. Ranches. And long before the hour appointed for the trial of speed, those curious to witness the race—a race for the most valuable stake ever run for in the Territory-began to arrive at the chosen rendezvous, full of speculation as to the result.

Although the excitement ran so high, there was comparatively little betting in sight. Even those—and they seemed to form the larger portion of the increasing crowd—who appeared the most confident that the bay horse was overmatched, at the agreed upon distance, made no attempt to back their opinion with money or hoofs. This fact alone showed how overwhelmingly the gathering was in favor of Basil Brock and against Laughing Leo.

Still, there were a few men who sturdily backed Tornado, bluntly declaring that "business was business," and horns won through an enemy would bring just as many dollars when driven to a market, as though they had come through the agency of a blood-relative. These few booked a number of bets, having no difficulty in finding customers, and though there was little or no money in sight, there bade fair to be a lively shifting of cattle after the race was over.

Not until near the hour named for the race to begin, did Queen Sate, escorted by Finn McAvoy alone, put in an appearance. This was greeted with loud cheers, long prolonged and heartily earnest enough to call a deeper flush to those rosy cheeks, a brighter light to her eyes.

Finn McAvoy looked a little graver than usual, and there was an expression in his massive face as he glanced keenly over the gathering, that only a man sorely out of temper or unusually ill at ease would wear. Possibly he missed his guest, Cicero Boggs.

Basil Brock had reacted the race-ground only a short time before them, but he was the first one to meet and greet the Belle of the Range.

"And oh! the pity of it!" ejaculated Queen Sate, as, with head on one side, her gloved hands tightly clasped and used as a partial support to her rosy cheek, her great eyes roving over the form of the young rancher with rapturous admiration, she raised her voice so that nearly every one present could catch her meaning. "All this, and it to be forever lost to posterity just for lack of a camera! All this, and not even a whitewash brush to catch and fasten it forever! Turn around, Basil Brock—turn slowly, that I may see just how nately yer tailor—or did ye sit up all night to do the makin' of it yersel', Basil dear?"

There was a general laugh, as well there might be; not because of the words in themselves, but there was such a broad contrast between the rapturous admiration of the first few sentences, and the broad, brogue-touched finale.

Basil Brock scowled blackly, but Queen Sate shot a consoling look from her lustrous eyes into his, that quickly drove the cloud away. And this was the more readily accomplished since Basil Brock appeared in a marvelously good humor, both with himself and all the company.

Just where it had come from Basil Brock alone could have explained, but he wore a regular jockey suit, from cap to tops, of the finest material and the gaudiest colors. The suit fitted his slender, well-knit figure to perfection, and if it had not been made expressly for his use, he had been exceedingly fortunate in his choice.

"There was not time, else I would have worn nothing but your colors, Queen Sate," he murmured, bending as closely to that lady's ear as he could conveniently manage. "Emerald green and gold—"

"Faith, my dear sir," laughed the Belle of the Range, her horse shying off a little, and thus compelling her to lift her clear tones a trifle higher, "it's green enough ye look now to civilized eyes, and there'll be yellow and to spare in the face av ye whin Laughing Leo turns at the winning-post with a look back to see what's happened ye that ye don't come up to congratulate him on the result!"

Basil Brock flushed hotly, then grew pale as death. He pressed closer, and rapidly mut-

"My ranch against your hand that I win the viciously.
race!" The your

"Wait until I see the other horse," laughed Queen Sate, tripping away from her ardent suitor.

Meanwhile those who had been agreed upon as judges by the owners of the rival racers were busy surveying the course, riding over it from one end to the other, seeing that the course was cleared of unusual obstacles, and that the turning-post had not been moved or otherwise tampered with during the night. For, gentle reader, more conversant with the conveniences of "civilization" than the rude make-shifts of "border ruffianism," you are not to expect the rigid rules and perfect appointments of Brighton Beach or Jerome Park.

The course was a straight one, one mile in length, the limit marked by a stout oak post planted in the ground. The racers were to turn about this post as best they might, then return to the starting point, thus making the race one

As the appointed hour drew nearer, many were the eager glances cast in the direction from whence the owners of the Triangle Ranch must come, and already there were offers to bet that neither Laughing Leo nor his brag racer would put in an appearance. That none of these offers were accepted went far to prove the great unpopularity of Leo Laughlin among his

neighbors, for probably there was not a person then present, unless it was Basil Brock himself, who had the faintest doubt but that the young rancher would put in an appearance for the race.

And then, just as Basil Brock was claiming the race and stakes by default, a small party was discovered rounding a clump of timber, coming from the direction of the Triangle Ranch.

"Where would your cattle be now, gentlemen, had I took up with your ridiculous bets?" cried Queen Sate, an exultation in her face and tones that sent a savage scowl into the bronzed face of Basil Brock. "Yonder comes Laughing Leo—and there's the winner of the race—for a hundred head! Who takes me?"

There was no answer, for Queen Sate was a privileged character. Nor did she wait to see if her bold challenge was accepted. A free rein and busy spur sent her good horse flying swiftly over the plain toward the approaching company—Laughing Leo, Spread Eagle Sam and a half-score of men employed on the Triangle Ranch.

from the agitated face thing out of the ordin transpired. Breathles ears to catch the word ly from her paling lips aghast at each other a with that vicious cry. Only for a moment.

The partners were mounted, of course, since no man goes afoot on the range. Tornado, only the shadow of his usual self, was being led between them, and there was a strong muzzle secured over his jaws.

The loco-weed had done its work too well. With drooping ears and head that only the halters held on a level; with stomach tucked up; with ribs that showed as plainly as those of a finely-trained greyhound; with sluggish, dragging tread—the wreck of a once noble racer—the victim of a most atrocious plot!

Queen Sate, possibly because all others took pains to avoid them, wished to give Laughing Leo a friendly greeting, and thus show him that he was sure of at least one stanch friend and backer in the pending trial, had acted on impulse in setting spurs to her horse and dashing from the crowd to meet "the enemy," as they might well be called. But as her keen eyes—as good judge of a horse and condition as the best jockey in all the cattle region—fell upon Tornado, she forgot all else in angry wonder.

"What have you been doing to the poor beast, Leo Laughlin?" she cried, sharply, her eyes flashing vividly. "Is that the way you bring a race-horse to the score? Is it mad yo are?" "Your servant, Miss McAvoy," coldly bowed

Laughing Leo.

"Oh, bother your compliments!" with an impatient bluntness that told how strongly she was moved by that sad wreck. "What has happened to the poor creature? What is the matter?"

"Locoed—that's what's the matter, mum!" grated Spread Eagle Sam, his voice low and strained, that dangerous, white, pinched look deepening about his nostrils. "Rattled by a livin' devil—that'll be a dead devil afore the day grows old, ef it kin be proved onto him!"

"Steady, pard!" warningly muttered Laughing Leo.

Queen Sate glanced sharply into that white, haggard face, and her own rosy cheeks visibly paled as she exclaimed:

"Then you think—"
"That you will act wisely by keeping a safe distance, Miss McAvoy," was the cold interposition. "Tornado— You can see for yourself!"

The black steed had lifted its head, and was glaring at the horse ridden by the Belle of the Range. Its nostrils were beginning to quiver, its flanks to heave in and out.

Queen Sate noted all this, but only by a passing glance. Her beautiful brows corrugated, and there was something of impatient regret in the tones with which she uttered:

"Then there will be no race? How provoking!"

The young rancher laughed, hard and almost

"There will be a race—if I have to carry Tornado instead of being carried by him, Miss Mc-Avoy. I'll cheat the devil so far, anyway!"

Queen Sate turned a shade paler and there was something close akin to terror in her voice as she cast an involuntary glance in the direction of the crowd, where the brilliant costume of Basil Brock was plainly visible.

"Then you think that he—"
"I think that you had better go back to your father, Miss McAvoy, and keep further from Tornado," sharply interposed Laughing Leo, shortening his grip on the halter, patting the arching neck of his steed. "Whatever else suffers, I don't want you to come to harm through this devilish outrage. Go—do you hear

Without a word, Queen Sate wheeled her horse and rode swiftly back to the crowd. And when Basil Brock rode up to her side, she looked him full in the face, her own white as that of a corpse, her voice low and unnatural as

"If this dastardly deed is your work, Basil Brock, and you dare venture into my presence again, I'll shoot you as I would a mad dog."

Despite his natural hardihood, and careful schooling of his nerves to meet unmoved the charges which he felt almost positive would be brought against him by his worsted rival, the

young rancher could not entirely hide his flinching as the woman he loved so madly uttered these fierce words.

"What deed? I don't understand you, Queen

"I pray that you don't! I'd feel disgraced forever if it should prove the truth—if what I fear is really so! Basil Brock, look me straight in the face and swear that you don't know who poisoned the horse that was to run against you this day! Swear that you nor yours tampered with him so as to—"

Basil Brock burst into a harsh laugh.

"Is it so? Discounting defeat, by the eternal! Drugging a horse to save a stake! There's honor and grit for you, gentlemen!"

Eagerly the men had gathered around, seeing from the agitated face of Queen Sate that something out of the ordinary course of events had transpired. Breathlessly they had strained their ears to catch the words that broke so impetuously from her paling lips. And now they stared aghast at each other as Basil Brock broke out with that vicious cry.

Only for a moment. Then a great majority made a rush toward the Triangle company, eager to see for themselves, and the most excited of all were those few who had backed their faith in Tornado.

Laughing Leo gave his halter to one of the men employed on the Triangle Ranch, riding forward to meet and check this wild rush. His voice rung out sharply, almost menacingly, as he cried:

"Keep your distance, gentlemen! You crowd

"No harm meant, Laughlin," spluttered one of those whose faith had been pinned to the black racer. "We only wanted—is it true that Tornado has been drugged?"

"You can answer that question when I bring him to the score for the word, gentlemen," coldly retorted Laughing Leo, his blue eyes blazing like twin stars as one hand dropped to the butt of a revolver at his waist. "Until then—keep your distance, if you please! If not—I'll clear the way if powder and lead can do it!"

Only one man and that man one who had come to be almost generally regarded as a coward; yet the excited crowd fell back instead of trying to press closer. There was something in the white face, the blazing eyes, the icy-cold voice that influenced them even against their will

Then, too, under the care of Spread Eagle Sam and the cowboy, the black horse was showing signs of overflowing spirits rather than looking like a horse drugged or poisoned. From seeming lifeless and decrepit, Tornado was transformed into a fiery, prancing, snorting racer. This to a casual glance, from a distance Closer—Spread Eagle Sam knew that the worst was coming!

Laughing Leo knew it just as surely, but the knowledge only nerved him more tensely, only rendered him harder and sterner outside; within, his veins seemed filled with liquid fire!

Back to the starting-post the crowd surged, and close at their heels rode Laughing Leo, coldly saluting Miss McAvoy, bowing to the judges who were curiously regarding him, troubled in mind and in face.

"Good-morning, Mr. Laughlin," cried Basil Brock, a peculiar smile on his bronzed face, as he touched the visor of his jockey cap. "Fine day for the race, isn't it?"

"I have not heard the judges call time, as yet, sir," icily retorted the other, gazing fairly into the eyes of his rival, but making no sign in return for that bow and salute. "Until then—we'll not cross hands, if you please."

Basil Brock flushed hotly, but managed to control his temper.

"All right, if you take it so hard, my fine fellow! I'd just as soon win from a boor as from a gentleman!"

Queen Sate impulsively pushed her mount in between the twain, one daintily gloved hand resting appealingly on the arm of Laughing

"For my sake, Leo!" she murmured, passionate love lighting up her great eyes. "For my sake—take my horse to ride!"

Not just what she first intended to add, but there was something that chilled her blood in that cold, almost scornful gaze. In that moment she began to hate Laughing Leo, almost as intensely as she had been ready to love him.

Without waiting for a reply, she reined her horse back; but this brief interposition had accomplished its purpose.

Spread Eagle Sam came up with the black racer, and as the cowboys all fell back in obedience to the gesture of Laughing Leo, a fair view could be had of Tornado. One breathless moment of silence, then the crowd broke into a loud buzz of curiously mingled emotions.

Even the greatest novice present could see that Tornado was in no fit condition for a race with the champion of the B. B. Ranch. Not one present but could see that Tornado had been drugged or poisoned

"Look your fill, gentlemen!" cried Laughing Leo, his voice clear and hard as the notes of a bell. "You see what that cowardly hell-

Fround has done to put it out of my power to win this race!"

"Do you dare accuse me of poisoning your horse?" sharply demanded Basil Brock, pressing through the crowd, his face fairly livid.

"Does the shoe pinch you so soon?" cried Laughing Leo, fixing his blazing eyes on his rival. "Did I mention your name?"

With a rush that hurled aside man and beast like chaff, Finn McAvoy drove his big horse through the crowd and stood betwen the rivals, one hand closing on the arm of Basil Brock as he thundered:

"Drop it, you hot-heads! There'll be no fightin' here, widout Finn McAvoy takes a hand inan' the best o' ye know what that m'anes!"

"Never fear, sir," and Laughing Leo bowed deeply toward Queen Sate. "Gentlemen never pull hair in the presence of ladies."

"Nor do they play such cowardly tricks in hopes of getting out of a tight box!" growled Brock, viciously. "But that won't save ye this bout! The race was made play or pay, and unless you come to the score on time, I'll claim the stakes by a walk-over!"

"Keep your temper, Mr. Brock," coldly retorted Laughing Leo, showing his teeth briefly. "It's play—and you will be the one to dance to the music, too! Room, gentlemen, if you please! I beg it of you, since the presence of ladies for-

bids my making it myself." He sprung lightly to the ground, flinging his bridle to one of his cowboys, and striding up to the head of the black racer, patting its veinmarked face, muttering soothingly as he cast off the muzzle.

"Sure, man, ye don't m'ane to run a race wia that crazy b'aste!" exclaimed Finn McAvoy, expressing the general amazement of his own accord.

"I believe I have the right to bring any animal to the score I choose, Mr. McAvoy," coldly retorted Laughing Leo. "You have nothing to say for or against, even though the fancy took me to ride a wooden saw-horse. Am I not right?"

"Divil take ye for a walkin' crab-apple, right or wrong!" indignantly spluttered the wild Irishman. "Ride a broomsthick av ye loike-devil a wan o' me'll say anither worrud, so I won't, now!"

Laughing Leo was hardly taking the proper course to increase his following, or to gain sympathy from the crowd, but he little recked for that. Just then he preferred a host of enemies to a single fresh ally.

"I wouldn't crowd it too fur, lad," muttered Spread Eagle Sam in low tones as he gripped the trembling racer more closely. "The hoss is goin' crazy! Fer God's sake putt that muzzle back!"

"Dead or alive, I said, Sam," grated Laughing Leo, his nimble fingers tightening the saddle in place, then taking the head of his racer and slipping the halter from it, in order to replace it with the bridle which he took from a whitefaced, uneasy cowboy, who hastily scuttled away the instant his hand was free.

And none too soon! The terrible loco-weed was doing its work, and the moment its head was free from the constant strain which Spread Eagle Sam had kept upon it from the moment the first signs of a coming spasm were perceptible to his practiced eye, the black racer plunged backward, screaming and neighing like a mad creature, scattering the cowboys like chaff before a high wind.

Spread Eagle Sam sprung for its head, only to be caught by the steel-like arms of Laughing Leo, and hurled aside as though he was but an infant. And then the young rancher cried, revolver in hand:

"Hands off, gentlemen! And I'll shoot the first man who tries to kill that black horse!"

CHAPTER XIV.

NOTHING SO UNCERTAIN AS A DEAD SURE THING.

INTENSE confusion reigned among the crowd as black Tornado broke away from his guardians with that frightful scream, suddenly transformed into an equine demon. Some were there who knew what this meant from past experience, and their excited cries of warning but added to the wild tumult as they used spurs and whips to urge their horses out of peril. And this very haste but served to make the confusion greater.

Men and horses were mixed up in an ugly tangle, from which came oaths and angry curses, everybody using their tongues and no one using judgment. Here and there rose a cry to shoot the horse before he did serious harm, and it was in answer to this cry that Laughing Leo pealed forth his fierce threat—a threat which all could see was meant to the very letter.

Crouching low back on its quivering haunches, the black racer glared viciously at the struggling mass before him. There was the red fire of madness in his eyes. The blood-tinged froth dropped in flakes from his open jaws, flying off in feathery spray with each sharp snort.

To those who sought room for flight and dodging, it seemed as though the black demon was only pausing long enough to single out some especial victim before making its savage charge.

And to more than one of those whose position rendered them the safer, with room in which to act freely, it even appeared as though Tornado was more particularly threatening his rival, the bay racer from B. B. Ranch.

Even as their excited cries of warning to Basil Brock rose high above the tumult, Laughing Leo felt a thrill of savage exultation, for he, too, saw the same thing. If Tornado, dying, should avenge himself!

There was time for no further thought than this. With a shrill, maniacal scream, Tornado plunged forward into the thick of the confused jam, biting, kicking, striking with steel-plated fore-feet, scattering the crowd to either side, cutting a clean swath through the mass.

Basil Brock narrowly escaped being crushed by the maddened beast, caught in the rush as he had been on his slender-limbed bay racer. But Laughing Leo saw him escape, and an oath of savage disappointment hissed through his teeth. Not that he wanted Basil Brock to die thus, but if Tornado had only cut down the rival on whose account he had been dosed so cruelly!

Through the mass, splitting the crowd in halves; but that was all. It was the final struggle of a noble horse against a frightful fate.

Tornado stopped short, stretching his neck far out, opening his jaws widely, drawing in the fresh air with a choking, whistling sound.

Then-high up on his hind feet he reared, wildly pawing the air with his fore-legs. One choking, anguished scream—then he fell over backward, striking the ground with awful force.

Even as he fell, Laughing Leo gained his side, but he came too late, for the black racer would never again hear or recognize the loved voice of its master.

With a revolver clasped in each hand, Spread Eagle Sam strode to the side of his Dandy Pard, wheeling and facing the still startled, still swaying crowd, his weapons partly lifted, his great eyes blazing like twin fireballs, his deep voice full of deadly menace as he thundered:

"Keep your distance, gents! Crowd too nigh, an' I'll begin building up a wall of dead corpuses right hyar!"

It needed but a single glance to assure Laughing Leo that Tornado was dead. In that backward fall he had fairly broken his neck. Accident had mercifully put an end to the torture of the loco weed.

"Let the gentlemen come, pard," he said, his voice cold and hard as when he had repulsed the mock advances of Basil Brock. "They can do no harm, now. Tornado is dead!"

"But not paid fer, yit!" grated the giant, his blazing eyes still riveted on the bronzed face of Basil Brock, who was now standing by the side of his bay, anxiously examining it to make sure it had come to no harm in that confused scramble.

Laughing Leo tapped the giant on the shoulder. Their gaze met, and the eye of the big partner fell first.

"Follow my lead as closely as you like, pard," said Laughlin, in cold, hard tones, "but don't try to go one inch in advance. You hear?"

The shaggy head bowed, and the giant lowered the hammers of his pistols, returning them to his belt; but there were those who saw that his hands still rested on their butts; that a single motion would serve to draw, cock and level the tools.

Now that the black racer was dead, the confusion quickly grew less, many of the company gathering around to satisfy their curiosity, while a few ventured to offer the white-faced rancher words of sympathy, more or less cordial as their different temperaments suggested.

To one and all, Laughing Leo simply bowed or nodded, his eyes for the most part following the movements of his rival who, again bestriding his dainty bay racer, was beyond the crowd, riding to and fro, carefully watching every movement of the horse to remove the last fears of its having received an injury.

"It's a sthreak av moighty bad luck, Laughlin," uttered Finn McAvoy, apparently having forgotten his rude rebuff of a short time before.

"But accidents will happen to—" "This was no accident. Rattle-weed was put in the manger of my horse, and sprinkled with a drug that made him crazy to eat it. Why the

hellish deed was done, I leave you to answer!" The face of the wild Irishman turned fairly purple, and he said:

"Av it's proof ye kin give us, Misther Laughlin, there'll be a bit av a hangin' match the day that'll go far to show ye all honor's not did in the crowd that, maybe, has given ye more frowns than smoiles! And the fisth av Finn McAvoy'll be the foorst wan to grup the rope!"

Laughlin bowed coldly, though the speech was plainly earnest and well-intentioned, but just then he wished no friends, no aid in accomplishing the purishment of the dastardly poisoner or in avenging the murder of poor Tornado.

"You doubtless mean well, sir, but I reckon I can wipe out my own debts without calling in outsiders. And I believe we came here for a

race, the first thing." Basil Brock had satisfied himself as to the perfect soundness of his pet racer, and resigning it to the care of a trusted cowboy, he was

moving toward the crowd gathered about the dead horse. His keen ears caught something of the last words uttered by Laughing Leo, and pushing his way through the circle, he spoke coldly to his rival:

"I am sorry your horse has met with an accident, Mr. Laughlin. It is doubly unfortunate, happening just now, when all our friends have come together for the purpose of enjoying a little sport."

"Possibly they may see some sport, even yet," coldly uttered Leo.

Basil Brock flushed a little, but still held his hot passions well in check. He felt that he could afford to appear magnanimous, now that

his rival was so thoroughly down in the dust. "Of course you know that our match was made play or pay, but under the circumstances. I hardly like to hold you bound by the strict letter of the match. If you beg off, I'll agree to draw the stakes."

His rival gazed steadily into his face while these words were being uttered, and for a brief space there was perfect silence. Then, clear and cutting, full of utter scorn, came the reply:

"You don't look like a fool, Basil Brock, but you talk like one!"

The insulting speech caused Basil Brock to start back much as he might from a slap in the face. One hand instinctively sought his hip, but he had removed his weapons when stripping for the anticipated "walk-over," and he had not rearmed himself since.

It was fortunate for him, perhaps, that such proved to be the case, for Spread Eagle Sam had him "lined" with the quickness of an expert, and he could not have drawn quick enough to foil death.

Basil Brock quickly rallied, and warningly flung up a hand toward his partisans who showed signs of breaking out in anger.

"Hold hard, friends!" he cried, sharply. "The man who chips in without asking my permission, is no friend of mine! And as for you, Mr. Leo Laughlin," turning toward his rival once more, his eyes glowing, his voice hard and vicious: "I'll ask you to repeat those words at another and more convenient time."

"If they are not plain enough, possibly I can bring others equally as true, to back them up," was the cool retort.

"Pay your debts first! Out of pity for you, I was willing to give you a chance to save yourself, but now-play or pay!" "I'll do the first-you may have to do the pay-

ing." Basil Brock, like one fearing to trust himself in the face of temptation, turned on his heel and pushed through the crowd, saying:

"Clear the course! And you, Messrs. judges, call up the horses for the race. I am ready at any moment."

Once more Queen Sate pushed her way to the side of the young rancher, making the same offer she had a short time before. The offer was again declined, though this time with a little more politeness.

"You mean well, Miss McAvoy, and I am truly grateful for your kind offer, even though I cannot accept it. The terms were fully understood; the pick of B. B. Ranch against the pick of Triangle Ranch. So, you see?"

"But you have no horse that can begin to compare with Red Rover, now that poor Tornado is dead!"

"I have one good enough to lose with, then," bowing coldly.

Repulsed, Queen Sate fell back; and with her retreated nearly all of the company, leaving the party from the Triangle almost alone. Leo smiled bitterly as he saw this, and muttered to his partner:

"You and I against the crowd, pard! If you had not stuck so hard against a division I'd have some sport out of it, even yet!"

"Go your hull len'th, pard," eagerly muttered the giant rancher. "Show 'em your grit. Bluff the durned curs! What matter ef we do git left. Thar'll be the fun o' skeerin' 'em-an' the world is plenty big fer us to wrastle a livin' out o' this range. Bluff 'em, pard! bluff 'em to the last horn an' hoof!"

There was no immediate response to this excited outburst. Laughing Leo was staring fixedly toward the patch of timber near which the starting-post was planted, gazing intently at a gay, brilliant figure sitting a horse just at the edge of the undergrowth.

What was it that brought the hot color to his cheeks? What made his eyes fill with such a

bright, yet softened light? "Time enough, pard," he muttered, as Spread Eagle Sam, in his impatience, plucked his sleeve. "Time enough. We can claim an hour's grace, if necessary, after the first call of horses to the score. Put in the time as best likes you, pard. I'll back you up in everything, just so you don't begin a row. If that must come, let the enemy

make the first move." Spread Eagle Sam was staring fixedly in the same direction as his Dandy Pard, and a low.

meaning whistle parted his lips. If Laughing Leo heard this whistle, be paused

not to ask its meaning. He moved hastily away in the direction of the grove. And though that gayly dressed figure vanished almost as soon as

the young rancher cleared the crowd, he strode swiftly on, unnoticed by "the enemy," as they gathered about the beautiful bay and its silk-

clad jockey.

Spread Eagle Sam watched them for a few moments, then his hands were braced against his hips, his leonine head went back, his massive chest swelled; and clear, shrill, unearthly, there split the air the wild, maniacal screech of the war-eagle!

The effect was almost ludicrous.

Horses reared and plunged, riders uttered cries of wondering alarm as they glanced around in quest of the author of that thrilling scream. Red Rover plunged and reared, testing the skill of Basil Brock to the utmost to avoid being hurled from his tiny flat saddle.

Once more Spread Eagle Sam sent up the peculiar yell to which, almost as much as his characteristic "blowing," he owed the name he bore—a name far better known on the Buffalo Range than here where tame cattle had taken

the place of their wild predecessors.

"Flutter yer feathers, ye buzzards! Droop yer tails when ye hear the war-eagle tunin' up fer a song o' triumph an' vict'ry! The ole Triangle 'g'inst the world an' all its 'lations! Five hundred head to add to its stock, good as won, an' I know it!"

"What lunatic is backing a dead horse?" sharply cried Basil Brock, with a glance over his shoulder as he strove to quiet his racer.

"A man, white-born an' decent! Turn your eyes this way, an' see what your lookin'-glass never showed back when you was alone an' squintin' into it'" cried Spread Eagle Sam, with another of his wild screams that sent Bay Rover off in another mad fright.

"Take all the bets that idiot offers, on my account, friends!" the angry rancher shouted, slackening his reins a little and rushing away on the back of his racer, hoping thus to calm it

down.

"Runnin' away from the face of an honest man!" laughed Spread Eagle Sam, now wholly in his element. "Takes time to git used to sech stranger things, so better jes' go one eye on it at fu'st, gents! Though I ain't in love with any o' the gang-leavin' out the ladies, in course!-I don't want to skeer ye all into fits! I'm Spread Eagle Sam-white, honest, chuck-full o' grit! An' I'm huntin' up the misfortinate critters as hain't got no more sense then to buck ag'inst the ole Triangle! Even up that we win the race! An' ef that looks too dead-open-an'-shet, why double the odds! Anythin' fer a bet!"

"Name your terms, and I'll take them, if they're at all within reason," coldly declared one of the party, who seemed to take the lead as a representative of the B. B. Ranch and its

owner.

"Head fer head to a thous'n' horns that the bay colt gits beat!" boldly cried Spread Eagle Sam, whipping out his book to note down the wager in case it should be accepted.

Although the owner of Red Rover had made no reservation in calling out his readiness to take all bets, this was such an enormous one that Basil Brock's representative hesitated, turning pale.

Spread Eagle Sam laughed loudly, scornfully, as he noted this. It was glorious—he felt that already he was paid for all prospective losses. One man, and he backing down the crowd! It

was glorious!

"Tuck water fu'st pop! Then I'll come down to your level, pard! They ain't nothin' mean bout me, 'cept the comp'ny I keep on sech 'casions as this! A rickety, blind, three-legged, week-old calf that the B. B. Ranch gits left!"

Still there was no acceptance, this time through pure rage and mortification at having laid themselves open to such a biting taunt.

"Too high up yit?" cheerfully laughed Sam, his face fairly glowing with delight at this wholly unexpected treat. "A counterfeit copper cent with seventeen holes through it, plugged with lead! Fer love o' sufferin' humanity, gents, do club together an' kiver this bet, even ef it does make the hull kit o' ye go dead broke an' in a stiddy run to see which kin git to the poor-house fu'st! Take me up, I beg o' ye! Anythin' fer a bet! Be durned ef I won't lend ye the money my own self!"

Even as he spoke, Basil Brock came galloping back, mounted on the horse of a cowboy, who hastened to carry him word of the startling offer made by Spread Eagle, leaving Red Rover

in the man's charge.

And it was to Basil Brock that the grinning

hide hunter addressed his last words. "If you mean business, talk business, Mr. Ingalls," sternly uttered the young rancher, reining in his horse. "Big or little, I'll take every bet you can offer, to the last hoof or horn

on the Triangle!" "Got over your skeer, sonny?" grinned Spread Eagle Sam, but adding briskly, again drawing out his note-book and pencil: "Take it or leave it as too big a mouthful fer your stomach to stan', critter! Head fer head, big, little, old an' young, hoss an' cattle, ag'inst thar match from your ranch; I'm bettin' every critter on the ole Triangle that you don't win this race with that

Red Rover o' yours!" "You are witnesses, gentlemen!" cried Basil

Brock, with a sweeping glance around the astonished crowd. "Head for head as far as the stock of the Triangle Ranch goes, that I win this race with Red Rover!"

"We hear it, Brock!" came a general shout. "Are you speaking solely for yourself, or does your partner know what you are doing, Mr. Ingalls?" abruptly demanded the other.

"They's only one mouth atween us when we

talk business, critter."

"Then I book the bet! And-mind you, my fine fellow!" leaning over in the saddle and shaking a quivering finger at the huge rancher, "I'll hold you to the letter of the bet! I'll strip Triangle Ranch of its last hoof, split or round, even though-"

"Won't ye win it fu'st, critter? Won't you give us even the show of a race?" grinned Spread

Eagle Sam.

"I'll win it--and on the back of Red Rover! Watch him close, gentlemen, and if he attempts

to save his stake by a shot or-"

dumb critter fer the dislike we owe its master We don't chuck rattle-weed into the manger of a hoss we've put up a big bet ag'inst!"

"Do you mean to insinuate-"

"'Sinuate be durned!" was the blunt interruption as Spread Eagle Sam strode swiftly to the side of the angry rancher. "I don't say you locoed Tornado—with your own hand! I don't say you'd hev grit or narve enough to try that on. But I do say this much: when this race is over, an' you've paid your losses to the last runted, stunted, rickety calf, I'll show the hull crowd the dirty whelp as locoed Tornado! An' when they've tuck a good, squar' look at him, as a moral curiosity, I'll give him a dose that'll make him sicker then pore Tornado ever was! That's what I'll do, an' ef you want me to speak out any clearer, why, be durned ef I don't try my level best to satisfy you—I will so !"

Basil Brock, in a voice that fairly shook with hot anger, turned his horse away, addressing

the judges:

"Call the race, or I'll run over the course and claim the stakes! Call the race—before I forget

that there are ladies present!"

Sharp and clear rung out the summons of "riders up!" and the word reached the ears of Laughing Leo, who was hidden from view among the timber near which he had caught sight of that brilliant figure. Not alone. With the gayly-dressed form beside him. The garb which Red-foot had displayed with such pride-but Red-foot was not the wearer!

"I refused the same offer from Queen Sate!"

Leo muttered.

"Her horse would lose—mine will win! Take it—ride and shame that evil man! If not for

your own sake, then-"

"For yours, Meta-lupa!" impulsively cried Laughing Leo, with a swift motion touching her brow with his hot lips, then leaping on the gray horse and riding at a leisurely trot back to the starting-point.

Spread Eagle Sam hastened to meet him halfway, his honest face all aglow with the rare sport he had so unexpectedly stumbled upon.

"The most fun!" he chuckled, but growing graver as he added, anxiously watching the face of his Dandy Pard as he spoke: "But I've bet every head on the ranch, pard! I couldn't let 'em bluff me!"

"I only wish the number was double, Sam," with a broad laugh. "I've got the horse that can down Red Rover at two mile-sure!"

A motion of his hand brought the cowboys around him, bearing the saddle and bridle with which Tornado had been partly equipped. And when the second call of the appointed judges came, Laughing Leo rode the gray horse up to the starting-post,

There was a low murmur of interest among the crowd as every eye turned upon the horse, and a fierce, almost savage light flashed in the dark orbs of Basil Brock, as though he recognized the animal. But there was time for no more.

The start was to be a standing one, and the sharp voice of the judge who had been selected

to give the word, now rung out: "Riders, are you ready? Then-GO!"

In such a start, there could be no jockeying, but with marvelous celerity, the red and the gray leaped off, head and head, without the slightest appreciable advantage. But the murmur rapidly rose to a wild roar as the excited crowd saw Red Rover gaining inch by inch, foot by foot, until the gray horse only hung to its quarter!

But there it hung like a shadow, although Basil Brock, driven half-insane by the taunts of the huge hide-hunter, together with his mad lust for revenge on the son of the She Welf, used both whip and spurs with savage free-

dom.

"Git thar, Triangle!" yelled Spread Eagle Sam, for once forgetting his celebrated scream. An' you jes' bet your boots she am, too!" with a fierce laugh. "Look at the monkey-rider play the whip! Look at them spurs! Glory to the etarnal! We've got 'em-got 'em bad!"

"The foolish divil!" snorted Finn McAvoy, one hand supporting the lithe figure of Queen Sate as she stood upright on her saddle. "Luck

at him latherin' the loife out av the poor baste! Luck at him pumpin' the wind out av him, an' divil a fut is he gainin'! It's mad the b'y hes gone-clane mad, an' divil a loie'll ye find in that worrud!"

There were plenty of others who saw how injudiciously Basil Brock was riding Red Rover, taking more out of him with whip and spur at this early stage of the race, than even the tremendously fast pace the gray horse was forcing him to take. And though it was now impossible for any of the party to say with anything like certainty which one of the horses was in the lead, owing to their position in the rear, many a lately proud heart grew faint and sick with a premonition of defeat.

Red Rover led around the turning post, but it was plainly from sufferance, for the next moment on came the gray, running low and level, until even the blindest looker-on could no longer doubt which animal was in the lead! In vain Basil Brock used whip and spur and "We are white men, critter, an' don't spite a voice. He had defeated himself during the first half-mile, and there were many shouts to greet Laughing Leo as he reached the post a winner, which would otherwise have been silent.

> CHAPTER XV. TALK WITH THE BARK ON.

BACK through the double ranks of spectators dashed the gray horse, Laughing Leo never so much as casting a glance over his shoulder to see how near-or far-his rival was, until after the winning-post was fairly passed, and the sensational race was lost and won.

Then he turned his head to look, and the ghost of a smile came into his white face as he heard the wild cheering of the crowd, nearly every member of which had been against bim until the last few moments. And he would have been more than human had he not felt a certain almost savage pleasure at the sight of Basil Brock, full a hundred yards behind, still plying whip and spur, the too hasty use of which had gone far to insure his defeat where defeat was more bitter than death.

Laughing Leo gently checked his good horse, turning it about and trotting back to the winning-post, where the judges were together, excitedly talking, gesticulating, evidently at fever heat. Laughlin called out, sharply:

"Your decision, gentlemen? Have I permis-

sion to dismount?" "All right, Mr. Laughlin; you can get down.

We'll give our decision as soon as the turningpost judges come in. Where in time did you pick up that gray ghost?" spluttered the judge, forgetting his importance in his curiosity.

But Laughing Leo seemed in no hurry to gratify this curiosity, for he wheeled about after a low bow, alighting when in the midst of his own cowboys, being fairly caught in the arms of Spread Eagle Sam and more than half smothered before he could extricate himself.

"Glory to the ram!" howled the balf-crazy rancher, tearing off his slouch hat and flinging it to the ground as a sort of platform on which to perform a frantic dance. "Git thar, Triangle! says I. An' we got thar—got thar in the most elegantest shape, an' didn't hev to more'n hafe try! Whar's the critters as tuck me fer looneymad when I lugged out a hull bogus copper cent an' made 'em all take water like waddin' ducks? We got thar-but I'd 'a' died a rich man ef thar'd bin anybody with grit enough on t'other side to kivered my penny!"

With his own hands Laughing Leo removed saddle and bridle, covering the gray winner with a blanket after the most approved racing style, until only head and legs remained in sight by which the horse could possibly be recognized. And all this was accomplished before Basil Brock succeeded in wheeling his beaten champion and reaching the judges' position by the

The two men who had officiated at the mile post, had come in and made their reports. There had been no foul riding, and so far as they were concerned, nothing to offer by which the positions of the horses at the outcome ought to be altered.

"Gentlemen-riders-have you anything to offer before the official decision is given?" asked the judge put forward as spokesman by his as-

sociates. "One word," hoarsely uttered Basil Brock, his face as white as its liberal coating of tan would allow. "The terms of this race were that any horse belonging to either ranch might be selected. You all know that I own Red Rover. Does that gray horse belong to the Triangle Ranch? If so-since when?"

"Will you oblige us with an answer, Mr. Laughlin?" gravely asked the judge, with a bow to the gentleman he addressed.

"I will answer any question you may say fit to address me, judge," with a bow that emphasized his words.

"The gray horse belongs to you, then?"

"It does."

winning-post.

"Since when?" viciously grated the defeated rancher. Laughing Leo turned upon his rival, his blue

eyes ablaze, though his tones were cold and even as he retorted: "Although I do not admit your right to ask

me a question, Basil Brock, I will answer this, more for the satisfaction of these curious gentlemen than for your own sake. The gray horse is mine, though only recently come into my possession. I had no need of one like him, good as he is, while Tornado lived. You know what happened to him, and—"

"Dare to even insinuate that I had anything to do with drugging or poisoning your horse, and I'll tear the lying tongue from between your jaws!" viciou ly snarled the half-mad

rancher.

"I never insinuate when I can bring forward plain proof," was the cold, even retort, Laughing Leo simply smiling at the fury of his baffled rival. "But to explain: My racer was locoed. I could not have withdrawn from the race, even had I wished to do so. I did not wish to do so. If nothing better had offered, I would have ridden a yearling calf against you, rather than give you the chance to crow over your victory! I mean your victory over the man, not the beast!"

"Then you bought the horse since Tornado

was rattled, Laughlin?"

"I have owned him only since last night,

judge."

"If you owned him only a single second before the race began, that is sufficient, Mr. Laughlin. There are no complaints of unfair riding or of foul play. Such being the case, we decide the gray horse wins the race and the

stakes dependent thereon!"

There was hardly as loud or united cheering at this announcement as there would have been had Red Rover proved victorious, though there were many more voices lifted on high than would have been the case but for the suicidal manner in which Basil Brock had ridden the race.

With a lack of politeness such as he was seldom guilty of, Laughing Leo turned away without deigning to acknowledge this ovation by so much as a nod or a touch of his hat. His face was white and hard-set, looking more like that of a loser than the face of a man who had

just won a fortune.

He uttered a few words into the eager ear of Spread Eagle Sam, and placed the gray horse in his particular charge. Grinning broadly, the giant rancher made his way through the crowd, surrounded by his cowboys until an open space was reached. Then a wave of his hand sent the herders back to the younger member of the firm.

Queen Sate was one of the first to reach the racing or fighting me-" side of the victor, and her commanding glance, added to the adroit plunging of her spirited steed, quickly cleared an open space around

Laughing Leo.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Laughlin, on your victory—a victory none the less deserved from being plucked fairly out of the fire!" she cried in clear accents, distinctly audible to all; but her head bent lower as she rapidly added, aimost in a hiss: "You refused my horse, yet you took that of another woman-and she a squaw! I admire your taste, Leo Laughlin!"

"Thanks, Miss McAvoy," with a profound bow. "It is delightful to feel that you and I

are of the same mind for once!"

"You smiling demon! I'll get even with you for that, if it takes a lifetime!" flashed the Belle of the Range, abruptly wheeling her horse as

Basil Brock approached.

The owner of the B. B. Ranch was still dressed in his silken suit, and so far as the outward eye could see, had not taken the precaution of arming himself since. His face was hard set, pale as the heavy coating of tan would permit, his eyes glowing redly. But his voice was carefully schooled, cold and steady as he touched his cap to the victor.

"The judges have decided you the winner of

this race and stakes, Mr. Laughlin." "Then what are you kicking about?" sharply

interjected Leo.

"If you are a gentleman, you will hear me out, sir.

"I am a gentleman, though, if I had any doubts on that point, be sure I would not come to you for a decision."

"You wish to provoke a quarrel I see! Well-" "I never quarrel save with my equals, Mr.

Brock."

There came a growing sound of indignation from the crowd that had gathered around the rivals. Laughing Leo was rapidly losing ground in their good will by his cold, insulting manner toward the man whom he had defeated, from whom he had just won an almost princely stake.

He could not help seeing this, but his eyes glittered with an almost fierce defiance as they glanced swiftly over the darkening faces. In that moment his new course was almost forgotten, and he was once more the reckless, yet devilishly cool sport of other days. All the stern restraint which he had bowed under for months past was cast to one side, and alone though he was for the time, in the midst of enemies both declared and secret, he even courted a collision.

"And I hold that no man is my equal as long

as he is in my debt." Basil Brock turned a shade paler at this de-

liberate affront, but he managed to control his mad hatred for the time being. He said:

"No man knows better than you, Leo Laughlin, that I can pay my losses on this race thrice over. No gentleman would throw out such a base insinuation, but I'll meet you on your own ground. The title deeds to my ranch, with all its belongings, shall be placed in your hands before night falls, as security for what I owe you and your partner. Will that satisfy you?"

"If not, any or all of us will go on your bond, Brock!" impetuously cried one of his friends; and a general chorus from the majority of those

present confirmed his offer.

Laughing Leo showed his teeth in an icy smile as he bowed to the ranchers, collectively, but his voice was cold and hard as ever when he spoke again!

"I neither wish nor will I accept your security, gentlemen. You owe me nothing. Mr. Brock is my sole debtor, and I prefer his bare word to your united bonds; not that I love him so dearly, but because I would rather, ten times over, have him prove a defaulter than have that debt canceled on time."

"Do you mean to insult me, sir?" hoarsely de-

manded Basil Brock.

"I never insult a man who is under obliga-

tions to me," coldly.

"I came here to admit that you defeated my horse fairly," slowly uttered the owner of the B. B. Ranch, his very calmness telling how intense was his inward rage. "And I came to offer you another race on your own conditions, over your own distance, at your own time. If you are not a coward, as well as an escaped felon, you will accept!"

There was an instant division of the crowd, surging back to each side in order to leave an opening for the lead which they one and all expected would begin to fly as those cutting words rung forth. But Laughing Leo only smiled and

folded his arms across his bosom.

"You are needlessly alarmed, gentlemen," he said, with mocking coolness as he glanced over their startled ranks. "I never kill a debtor until after he ceases to be such. And Mr. Brock will have to hurl something more pointed than empty epithets at my head before he succeeds in making me break this unwritten rule. Besides —he knows that his life is sacred to me."

"The excuse of a coward, and therefore not surprising when coming from the lips of your mother's son!" viciously grated the owner of the B. B. Ranch. "If I can't crowd you into either

"Mebbe you'll do the next best thing, an' try to worry along with the ole man!" came a clear, mocking voice as Spread Eagle Sam pushed his way through the crowd and stood by the side of his Dandy Pard. "I ain't more'n a tit on a hog 'longside my pard, but I'll try to keep you from fallin' asleep over the lickin' ef you want to 'cept a substitute; be durned ef I don't, rattleweed!"

Another angry muttering from the crowd, and more than one hand dropped to the butt of revolver or haft of knife. It was clear that the owners of the Triangle Ranch were rapidly losing the new friends their victory had won them.

Spread Eagle Sam cast a swift glance over the darkening faces, a reckless laugh springing to his lips. Never before had he stopped to count odds, and he was too old to begin now.

But before the taunting words which rose in his throat could find birth, Laughing Leo tapped him on the shoulder, and Queen Sate urged her horse through the narrow lane, frowning im-

periously.

"For shame, gentlemen!" she cried, her voice ringing out sharp and clear, full of scathing rebuke. "Gentlemen? Dogentlemen make such a disgraceful exhibition of themselves in the presence of ladies? Do gentlemen snarl at each other like wild beasts over a carcass? For shame, I say again! I am ashamed of you all ashamed of myself in that I cannot deny belonging to the same race! Ashamed of you, Basil Brock, when I see you stooping so far below your rightful level. And I am even ashamed of those two-gentlemen," with a barely perceptible pause that lent a stinging meaning to her words as she flashed a look of scorn into the faces of the two pards, "whose conduct this day has better fitted them for the title of professional bullies!"

"Your humble servant, Miss McAvoy," gravely responded Laughing Leo, doffing his hat and gracefully bowing to the sarcastic beauty. "While deeply regretting having fallen under your displeasure, allow me to say in self-defense that there are times when a man has to use disagreeable truths as weapons against dishonest antagonists. Still, I pledge my word to deal as gently with the erring as possible, if only in hopes of regaining your good

will." "Come out o' that, ye vixen!" growled Finn McAvoy, crowding forward and grasping the head of his wayward daughter's horse, forcing her out of the crowd, angrily berating her as he

led her to a distance. Basil Brock took advantage of this diversion to beat a retreat, forcing himself to bide a more favorable opportunity for getting even with the

man whom he now hated a thousand times more intensely than before: and "that was needless," to use the vernacular.

The crowd fell back from the pards of the Triangle Ranch, leaving them alone, save for their small body-guard of cowboys, who seemed anything but at ease in the face of such overwhelming odds.

Laughing Leo was not content to retire even yet, though he might have done so with some degree of honor. He had suffered so long in silence, under insults, slights and wrongs, that now he had fairly broken the ice, he was resolved to leave no room for further misunderstanding.

With a swift motion he stepped a little in advance of his big pard, lifting a hand to command attention, his voice cold and clear:

"Gentlemen, if I have not too thoroughly disgusted you with my peculiar conduct, I wish you would listen to a few words of explanation before we part. While I don't mean to trample on the corns of any innocent man present, if I can help it, I'm going to give you words with the bark on!"

"If you must talk, why not answer Basil Brock?" derisively cried one of those who had

lost heavily on Red Rover.

"As he once said to me, I'll talk to him when he has paid his losses," was the sharp retort. "Or, ef he's too hungry to wait that long, be

durned ef the ole man won't try to swell up into a lunch big enough to keep him from starvin' to death!" grinned Spread Eagle Sam.

A backward wave of Laughing Leo's hand silenced the big rancher.

"We came here, gentlemen, meaning and hoping to lead a quiet, peaceful life. To be civilized, even as we counted on being treated like white men. Instead—what was the result?

"Although not a man among you can point out a single act of incivility on our parts: though not one among you all can truthfully accuse us of double dealing, of cheat or fraud: though the bitterest enemy we have in all this. section cannot truthfully point out a single blot on our record, unless our winning this race today is regarded as one; you have treated us like outcasts! You have done all that men could do to ruin our business, to make our lives unbearable, to drive us from this section—and all for what?"

"Because we fancied your room more than your company!" cried one of the ranchers,

bluntly.

"And had not manhood enough to come out in plain words! Were too cowardly to say as much to our faces, but instead took to boycotting us, just as all other curs do!" Truly, Laughing Leo was keeping his word!

He was giving them "talk with the bark on,"

and that with a vengeance.

There was a stir among the crowd, and a few hands dropped to pistol butts; but with a besitating motion that hardly meant business. Perhaps their great superiority in point of numbers was the reason. Possibly it was because Laughing Leo made his title good by actually laughing in their faces as he confronted them, his empty hands folded across his swelling chest.

"You snarl and show your teeth, but you won't bite," be added, in cold, even tones that were not altogether free from contempt. "I am glad to see that you are not all lost to a sense of decency, and that gives me courage togo on."

"Let it give you a little smoother tongue, Mr. Laughlin," coldly interposed the judge who had announced his victory over Red Rover.

"If my words are rough-edged, blame those who have given me an excuse for uttering them, sir," retorted the young rancher. "Rough as they may be, they are smoother than velvet in comparison with the treatment we have received among a community composed, as we had a right to suppose, of gentlemen. If you doubt—listen yet a little further.

"Not a man present but knows how I tried to avoid making this race with Basil Brock. I tried to avoid it, until you began to sneer and whisper about cowardliness. Only to still your tongues and ward off a quarrel which could end

only in bloodshed, did I yield at last. "You may remember that I rode my buckskin, Mott, when I left you. I passed by the spring on my place, and stopped to water both horse and self, as is my custom. My horse drank from the trough which every man among you have utilized for the same purpose. Drank -and you will find his bloated carcass lying by that spring, with a notice 'poison' planted beside him."

This speech created a sensation among the crowd, and more than one face turned pale at thoughts of what might have been; for Laughing Leo had kept within bounds when he stated that every one present had used that same spring on occasions.

"Worse than that, gentlemen," he resumed. in the same cold, harsh tones: "Not only was the water in the trough poisoned, but the spring itself was poisoned! I dug up a shot-sack full of poison-arsenic, I think, though I am not yet positive: I will be able to say with certainty ere long-placed in the ground where all the water

had to soak through that sack before falling into the basin. Luckily I had not touched the water before I made the discovery, else you would not

be listening to my words now.

"You know what I found when I reached the ranch—Tornado driven mad by loco-weed that some cowardly hound had placed in his manger. You know how he died—a death which I would gladly have shared, if by that means I could have saved him.

"By spending the night working over him, with my pard, we managed to bring him here alive. Why? To silence the mouths of the demons who were ready and waiting to set up a howl about our drugging our horse as an excuse for drawing the stakes. How vilely they would have lied, you can see when I say that I meant to start in the race on his poor back! I did attempt to,

"Who poisoned my spring? Who was willing to risk poisoning one or a score of you, on the chance of murdering me? For if the poison was meant solely for my horse, why was it planted above the drinking-basin we all have used repeatedly? Who put that cursed rattle-weed in the trough from which Tornado ate his food?

Certainly not a friend.

"Gentlemen, I name no names. I accuse no one man of perpetrating these foul outrages, for I have no positive proof. If I suspect, I am not going to accuse until I have proof enough to convict the demon before a jury of his dearest friends. Then—I will punish!"

With almost savage intensity came the concluding words. And they caused more than one heart to thrill with awe among that crowd.

Before any one present could collect themselves sufficiently to speak, Laughing Leo coldly re-

sumed:

"You see now, gentlemen, why I saw fit to make use of rough words, as you chose to term them. You see now why I have acted, as I felt, as though the hand of every man was against my pard and self. Any man with a spark of manhood in his bosom would have done the same.

"Mind you, I am accusing nobody. I suspect, but until I can prove, I will never again mention these hellish deeds. In the mean time I will merely give this warning to those who can

best understand it.

"We are here to stay! Many as you are you are not strong enough to drive us from our ranch. You may kill, but you can't drive or frighten! We will exact our dues to the last hoof, even as we will pay all claims that may arise against us, though it takes the last horn. We do not ask you to be neighbors, more than in name. until the time comes when you see fit to ask that of us as a boon. Until then—gentlemen, we have the honor to bid you a polite good-day!"

Laughing Leo bowed low, then replaced his hat and turned to his faithful pard and his cowboys, cool and placid as though he had not just won a fortune and tongue-lashed a crowd.

"Amen! says the wusser an' lesser half o' the Triangle!" impulsively cried Spread Eagle Sam, with one of his inimitable screams that fairly rent the air. "An' all them that don't like the tarms kin call on the ole man fer satisfaction! From fists to howltwisters, be durned ef it makes a diff o' bitterence to him! One or the whole kit-an'-b'ilin'! An' the more there is, the better he'll be satisfied!"

"Simmer down, pard," smiled Laughing Leo, tapping the hide-hunter on his arm. "I reckon the gentlemen have got enough to think over as it is. One word with you, pard," he added, drawing Sam to one side. "You saw her? You gave her back the horse?"

"An' she skittered off, keepin' the timber in line with the crowd, like she was in a hurry to

git some'rs," grinned Sam.
"An' you told her—"

"That you'd do the tellin' your own self, pard," was the swift interposition. "An' blamed if I flon't lick the stuffiin' out o' you ef you don't make my promise good, the very fu'st chaince you kin git!"

CHAPTER XVI.

In the deepening twilight Queen Sate was nervously pacing to and fro, her white brow corrugated, and something that was still hotter than impatience glowing in her great eyes.

It was the evening of the great race which had been attended by so many sensational features, but which, contrary to all expectations, had terminated without a blow being struck or a grain

of powder being burned.

Queen Sate was alone, and in a lonely spot, by the edge of the timber island where Cicero Boggs had fallen into the power of his enemies on the night last past. Though not so very far distant from the Emerald Ranch, all view of that building was cut off by the clump of timber intervening.

Queen Sate was alone, but she had an air as of expecting some one with the passage of each moment. She started at the lightest sound, flashing keen glances in whatever direction the

noise proceeded from.

But with all this impatience, she was anything but delighted with the coming of the man who,

without the slightest warning sound, sprung before her from cover, and dropped to his knees with a passionate cry.

"Miss McAvoy—Queen Sate—angel of light and love! frown not, but look with pity and compassion on the poor wretch who flings his heart in the dust at your feet!"

Instinctively the beautiful Amazon sprung back as this figure so unexpectedly fell at her feet, for right well she knew that the one for whom she was keeping this appointment would not dare act after such an insane fashion, and it was not without a second glance that she recog-

Even then she doubted the correctness of her sight and memory. Even then she kept that suppliant figure covered with the revolver which her practiced hand had so swiftly drawn from the belt at her waist. The metamorphosis was almost as great a surprise as the action.

"Are ye crazy, man?" she ejaculated, the "touch of the brogue" showing more plainly, as it ever did when either she or her father grew

excited or amazed.

"Crazy—mad, Queen Sate!" impetuously exclaimed the kneeling man, shuffling along on his knees and attempting to catch her unarmed hand between his. "Love-mad, and dying for one pitying word from those sweet lips! For one kind glance from those glorious eyes.

"Ye audacious villain, it's drinking ye've been, or ye'd niver dare utter such words to the like o' me! Is it a red squaw ye think me? Is it evening yerself to the daughter of Finn Mc-Avoy that ye'd be afther, ye drunken vagabond?" indignantly cried the Belle of the Range, with a deft movement of her wrist rapping him over the knuckles with the barrel of her revolver.

The suppliant was indeed none other than Red-foot, now clad in the gorgeous suit which he had obtained from Basil Brock for the express purpose of "going a-courting." Red-foot, looking a little the worse for the heavy stupor into which he, with Old John, had been thrown by the drugs of Meta-lupa in order that she might carry out her desperate resolve, taken just after hearing her brother tell his story of the locoed racer.

But Red-foot in name only; in name and reputation. The bright-hued moccasins which had first fastened that name upon him, were cast aside in favor of a pair of boots. The rags and blanket were supplanted by gold-laced finery. The brick-red hue of his face even seemed many shades lighter, perhaps because he had literally followed the sarcastic advice of Basil Brock and risked his health in a copious bath!

He sprung to his feet as that sharp stroke sent a thrill of pain up his arm, but never flinched as Queen Sate stepped sharply back, her pistol-hand rising and the weapon covering his heart. Instead, one finger tapped his swelling bosom as

though to help her bullet home.

"It is here, Queen Sate—right here the heart that beats so full of love for you!" he uttered, his voice choking with his mad passion. "Look into my face; it is the face of a man whose birth is at least the equal of any gentleman on the range!"

"You—a dirthy vagabond of a red-skin!"
"There is not a drop of red blood flowing in my veins! I am white!—white and free-born, Queen Sate!" impetuously cried Red-foot, flinging back his head with real or assumed proudness. "Look once more: am I red? Is my

"So much the more shame on you, then!" laughed Queen Sate, her red lips curling with scornful amusement. "Ye've looked and acted the vagabond too long for a wash to cl'ane ye up. You've been the slave and dirthy-worker of Basil Brock too long to blot out the record so aisily. An' ye've been kis ing the bottle too close this day for me to punish as ye're impudence richly desarves! But don't push forbearance too far, ye villain! Take to yer heels an' slink back to the kennel where ye're most at home, befoore I forget that I'm a leddy an' send ye howling to the Ould Boy wid a bullet t'rough the empty skull av yez! Git!"

Not elegant. Hardly ladylike, or such speech as one would expect from a beautiful woman. But decidedly convincing, even to one as near

mad with love as this poor devil.

Red-foot knew then how utterly he had befooled himself when he counted on winning this
Amazon by a display of fine clothes and finer
words; when he had high hopes of working on
her romantic vein by declaring his high birth
and endle s riches, winding up with tearing off
the mask he had worn so long—solely with the
purpose of winning her love for himself, the
man, not the rank and riches with which he
was now ready to smother her.

Even a purblind lover could not mistake her utter contempt for him, both as man and suitor. And with a grating curse he sprung upon the woman, wresting the pistol from her careless grasp, casting it far away as he pinioned her arms, one hand clasped firmly over her lips.

"I wanted to win you by fair means, my beauty!" he grated viciously. "But win and wear you I will, by foul—"

Once more Red-foot was doomed to bitter disappointment.

A dark figure leaped out of the undergrowth, alighting close beside the ruffian and his vainly struggling captive. One strong hand caught him by the throat, only to destroy that clutch by a sledge-bammer blow from the other, tightly clinched, which hurled Red-foot endlong a dozen feet away, stunned and helpless for the moment.

With cat-like activity the new-comer leaped after, stripping the impetuous wooer of every weapon, and using his own belt to fasten both

hands behind his back.

Queen Sate uttered a low, gasping cry as she stared at the figure of the man whose coming had been so opportune. And as he turned from his captive, she shrunk back, pale as a ghost, trembling in every limb as she fully recognized Cicero Boggs!

"Calm yourself, I beg of you, my dear Miss McAvoy," came gently, soothingly from his smiling lips. "The impudent varlet is past doing any one harm, and I promise you he shall most humbly beg your pardon for any fright he may have caused you."

"You-Wirt Dalton!" panted Queen Sate, mechanically feeling for a weapon, the horror and dread deepening in her eyes and face.

"Cicero Boggs, ma'am, at your service," was the quick response, as the "tenderfoot" stepped closer to her side, with anything but rancor or menace in his voice or face. "The same whom you treated so generously yesterday. The same whom you so kindly warned of dange last night. I am delighted to be enabled to even partly repay that courtesy so soon!"

Queen Sate rather looked for angry repreach, if nothing more pointed, and shrunk still further away, shiveringly. Cicero Boggs saw this, and after a quick glance toward the faintly moaning Red-foot, who was just beginning to recover from that master blow, he hurriedly uttered:

"You have nothing to fear from me, Miss McAvoy. On my honor as a man I assure you of this. But I beg of you to wait here until I have read this rascally fellow a little lesson. I would like to have just a friendly word or two with you before we part again."

"Yet—you know—" faltered Queen Sate, for once fairly cowed by this unexpected en-

counter.

"Nothing to make you shiver and shrink away from me, Miss McAvoy," was the quick interposition. "Will you grant me a brief interview?"

He spoke more like a suppliant than a man who held her good name, if not her life or liberty in his hands. Queen Sate felt this, and though it by no means lessened her uneasiness on one score, it did partially restore her usual courage.

"You have the right to order—"
"Instead of which I beg a favor," Cicero Boggs interposed, one finger touching his lips as he glanced quickly in the direction of the gayly clad red-skin, who was beginning to struggle to his feet.

A strong hand assisted Red-foot in this, and the same hand twisted him around until his livid face confronted both his captor and the lady whom he thought to win, by foul means if not by fair.

"I'll drain your heart, curse you!" he snarled, vainly striving to free his hands. "You struck

me_;

"Just a tap to arrest your attention, my dear fellow," purred Cicero Boggs, with the blandest smile imaginable. "You were so busy that I had to touch you, though I wish I had had an old pair of gloves on! You scoundrel!" with an abrupt change of face and tones, his strong hand pushing Red-foot nearer to Queen Sate and forcing him to his knees at her feet, despite his struggles. "Beg pardon of the lady for your worse than brutish conduct! Beg, I say, or I'll twist the head off your shoulders!"

Bold though he might have been in some respects, and under more favorable conditions, Red-foot was thoroughly cowed now. He felt that he was in the hands of his master. That terrible grip on his neck told him that this man could carry his threat into execution, should he try. And something added that he would make that attempt, too, in case of obstinate refusal.

In mumbling accents—the words he could scarcely recognize himself—he obeyed, shivering

"That is enough, Mr.—Boggs," faltered Queen Sate, shrinking back from what, in her usual high spirits, she would have regarded as a jolly lark and the choicest of sports. "He is hardly accountable—drunk, no doubt. And he is only

a half-crazy Indian vagabond!"

"I am white as—"
The fingers of Cicero Boggs shut off his bot words and his wind as well. The same mighty grip lifted him to his feet and wheeled him about. And then a foot lifted him clear of the ground and sent him reeling forward along the edge of the underbrush.

"It hurts my feelings almost as much as it can yours, my dear son of the mighty ferest," blandly uttered Cicero Boggs, as his foot sent the howling wretch still further ahead. "But I'm a slave to duty—a meek and obedient martyr to the calls of justice. Every admonition which I give and you receive, causes my poor

heart to fairly overflow with pity and regret that a fellow of your truly admirable points and noble top-loftiness should stoop so low as to become the football of fate, as personified in the

person of yours truly."

Each sentence was punctuated, as it were, by a tremendous kick, the deft hand of the speaker restoring Red-foot's balance whenever that was too badly destroyed. And his voice was still raised in reading this unique lecture to Red-foot when they faded from sight of Queen Sate. But not for long.

With a tremendous kick that hurled Red-foot forward on his face, Cicero Boggs darted into the timber and quickly returned with a horse, upon whose back he flung the groaning, battered wretch, bidding him hang on tight. Then a vigorous slap on the animal's haunch sent him off at full speed through the deepening twilight.

Mild and placid as though simply out for a lazy stroll in the pleasant evening, Cicero Boggs returned to the Belle of the Range, who was

strangely subdued and ill at ease.

Cicero Boggs saw this, and his beaming smile disappeared as he paused before her, doffing his hat and holding it with both hands before her breast. And it was in the words and tone of a suppliant, rather than those of a master, that he addressed her:

"Miss McAvoy, can you ever pardon a miserable wretch who has sinned so awfully against hospitality? May I speak a word in defense of

my seemingly inexcusable conduct?" "You have the power-do not press it too far!" muttered Queen Sate, with a glow in her

large eyes that told of gathering courage.

"I am the most wretched of men, dear ma'am," with increased humility in face and tones. "You must have been terribly shocked at my mysterious disappearance this morning, when I should have appeared at your hospitable board, but—with shame and anguish I confess it!—I am a somnambulist, and in my slumbers I must have got up and dropped out of the window, to wander far away through the night, and-"

Queen Sate interrupted him with a passionate gesture, her hard, unnatural tones showing how severely she felt this, as she considered it, sneer-

ing mockery.

"Why talk like that, you bloodhound? Why keep up such a miserable pretense, when you know as well as I do that you came to our ranch as a bloodhound, scenting victims? When you know that you dogged me out here, last night, in hopes of twisting a repe to put about my neck! But I foiled you then, and I may foil you again, despite your escape from the men in whose charge I placed you!"

"Miss McAvoy, I am glad that you have spoken so plainly, since now I feel at liberty to do the same," was the grave response. "I knew that you were more or less deeply concerned in my capture, last night, but I hold no grudge. I don't even ask how you threw dust

in my eyes."

"It was my voice you heard, even as it was my figure which you dogged from the house," recklessly admitted Queen Sate. "When you were captured, I hoped to still your tongue should you ever escape. I changed clothes with Pretty Poll, who could imitate my voice perfectly."

"So I half-helieved, but was not sure," laughed Cicero Boggs, as he gently took her hand between his, holding it closely despite her involuntary effort to free it. "And now, knowing all this, Miss McAvoy, I earnestly beg of you to give me shelter for this night beneath your roof. If you will, I promise, on honor, to not walk again in my sleep."

Queen Sate stared at him with wide-open eyes, unable to comprehend what he would gain by this strange course. Cicero Boggs laughed softly; then meeting her eye to eye, grave and gen-

tle, he added:

"It is hard for you to give me credit for being a man, instead of the bloodhound you it would be impossible to match or duplicate in have so often called me; but the time will come, I sincerely trust, when you will be more generous. I am plotting naught against you or yours, Miss McAvoy. I have no hard feelings for what is past. If I have any regret, it is that you have permitted yourself to become entangled in what may prove a death-trap to all who refuse to take timely warning. May I speak still more plainly?"

There was no reply in words, but Queen Sate vielded to the gentle force which led her away from the timber and in the direction of the Emerald Ranch. And as they walked, Cicero

Boggs talked on.

"You were right in calling me a detective, Miss McAvoy, but I came to this section on business wholly unconnected with you or yours. I am hunting for a criminal known as Briscoe Davidson, who has long been wanted for murder. Yet it is true about the Parkindale fortune, though I took up that simply as a mask to my real purpose.

"You see, I am frank with you, at last. Do

you know why?" Queen Sate shook her head in the negative. "Because I wish you to trust me wholly in return. Do not misunderstand me, dear girl," as she shrunk away from his side. "I have noth-

ing to do with the party that is running off

stock here, and among whom I fear you number some dear friends. I will neither interfere with them nor utter a word that can cause them trouble, bloodhound though you have called me. Shall I tell you why?"

"If—if you wish," faintly murmured Queen Sate, forced to cling to his strong arm to steady

her steps.

"Because I have taken a deep interest in you, Sarah McAvoy," was the low, earnest response. "Because I wish to give you time to realize whither your footsteps are trending-time to forever break off all such perilous connections. For, sooner or later, the band must come to grief. You are smart enough to know this, Queen Sate! Does it not always turn out so? Are not the wages of sin ever the same?"

With a choking sob Queen Sate drew away her hand and faced the detective, her eyes flashing with strangely mingled emotions, ber face white as that of a corpse, her voice choked and

unnatural as she said:

"Why do you talk like this to me? You know I thrust you into danger, although I knew that the odds were frightfully against your ever escaping with life! You know that I am a member of this league, and therefore a criminal, liable to arrest as such! Why do you not arrest me? You are playing with me as a cat plays with a mouse—you demon!"

Gravely Cicero Boggs confronted her as she spoke. Gravely he listened to her passionate, almost incoherent speech. But when her voice choked so that she was forced to pause and gasp for breath, he once more took her hands between his, speaking earnestly, tenderly:

"You are far more sinned against than sinning. It would be worse than murder to arrest you on your own confession: for that would forever destroy your soul by covering it with shame and degradation in your eyes, at least, even should you escape scot-free. That is one of my reasons, Queen Sate," and his voice grew more musical than grave, a smile lighting up his strong features, rendering them very unlike the same when belonging to Cicero Boggs. "Shall I tell you another?"

There was silence, and that, as everybody knows, is supposed to give consent. So Cicero

Boggs interpreted it, and added:

"Because I begin to feel the need of a nurse and guardian, dear Miss McAvoy, to cure me of this atrocious habit of somnambulism! And I thought that possibly I might, in time, persuade you to-"

proudly.

"To introduce me to some person who would agree to take that vast responsibility upon her shoulders," blandly added Cicero Boggs, just as though these were the words upon his lips in the first place. "And now, may I repeat my request for a night's lodging, dear Miss McAvoy?" "If you dare risk it—yes!" was the cold re-

sponse.

CHAPTER XVII. A LIVING AVALANCHE.

THE day following that on which Red Rover was defeated by the "Gray Ghost," as that worthy equine was almost universally dubbed, was a very busy one to all on the Triangle Ranch.

With the first streak of dawn a representative of the B. B. Ranch called there, gravely saluting Laughing Leo and Spread Eagle Sam as the partners hastened to answer his summons. Briefly the man introduced himself, though this was not the first time by many that they had met. Stiffly he acknowledged their cordial greetings, then at once settled down to business.

"Mr. Basil Brock sends me to learn the exact number of head, big and little, old and young, horses, mules, cattle, sheep, hogs-in one word to take a complete census of the Triangle Ranch, only excluding the human stock: those he says

this region." "I am delighted to see that your master has at least one qualification of an honest man left -candor," blandly bowed Laughing Leo. "Still, it pains me that he should feel compelled to thus publicly confess his inferiority; and isn't it rather hard on you poor devils who are un-

The fellow flushed hotly, and an angry glitter came into his eyes at this adroit twisting of what he had thought would prove a rankling thorn in the ribs of these conceited interlopers. But Spread Eagle Sam was standing close to him, with a fist tightly clinched and looking big and hard enough to knock down a bull, let alone a man. And after one uneasy gulp, the

envoy from the B. B. Ranch concluded to pass

the gilded insult by without further notice.

lucky enough to serve under him?"

He shortly explained that the original bet of five hundred head of market steers were already on the way to Triangle Ranch. That the herders were busily rounding up another five bundred head, which would follow in a very short time, accompanied by Basil Brock in person, who would then expect to receive a full and complete inventory of all the stock owned by the Triangle firm.

"He bade me add that the men in his employ, not actually engaged in transferring these thou-

AND ADDRESS OF THE PARTY OF THE

sand head to you, gentlemen, would be busily? engaged in collecting his cattle, from which would be picked the remnant necessary to cancel his losses of yesterday. He is doubly anxious; to have the matter settled, so that, his hands free, you can have no further excuse for refusing him satisfaction."

"Did Mr. Basil Brock bid you tell me this?" The overseer flushed anew. He could not say in so many words that his employer had made any such request. In his anger and his hatred for the new firm, for he had lost considerable of his savings by backing Red Rover, he had been led on to say more than he could fairly back up

with proof.

"Because, if he did, you may go back the way you came and give your master a lesson in good manners. When he has a favor to beg, let him come, hat in hand and ask it by word of mouth. And if he really expects a gentleman to meet him as you hint, bid him first cleanse his hands of poison-bid him make sure the scent of loco-weed does not hang too strongly about his person. Then-I'll see him!"

"You talk mighty brash," growled the overseer, frowning blackly. "I am alone among

your crowd, but-"

"Keep a half-way civil tongue in your head, my dear sir, and you are as safe here as you would be on the B. B. Ranch," coolly interposed. Laughing Leo. "But when you set out to crack the whip over us, don't begin to whine if the tip of a cracker happens to touch you to the quick. It is not like a man—and in decent company for a year or so, you would not make such a poor shadow of a man, after all!"

If the lesson read the overseer was a trifle sharp, he knew that it was not wholly unprovoked, and had sense enough left to see that his most sensible action would be to adopt another course altogether. This he did, sticking closely to business, acting as one gentleman among his equals, and by the time the first installment of cattle reached the Triangle Ranch, be was put wholly at his ease by the frank geniality of the man whom he had come there prepared to insult.

Still, he found that Laughing Leo was "all business." That he was determined to exact his

winnings to the very last item.

Since the death of Tornado, Leo Laughlin had done much steady thinking, and with the aid of Spread Eagle Sam in recalling all that they had been called upon to suffer and put up with since first coming to that section, rejecting all which "Sir!" cried Queen Sate, drawing back they could not almost positively trace back to the agency of Basil Brock, he had conquered much of that morbid sentiment which caused him to shrink from resenting even an insult from the son of the man who had fallen by the hand of his mother.

He felt convinced that Basil Brock had caused the poisoning of the spring, and the drugging of Tornado with the infernal loco-weed. And soberreflection told him that such an evil wretch was deserving of no more mercy than he himself had

showed.

"Double the amount would not pay for poor Tornado's death by such atrocious means," he said, sternly.

"Make him pay all that, an' then take the rest out o' his hide, ef he comes struttin' 'round any more," grinned Sam, in grim delight at having at last fairly roused his Dandy Pard.

And so it was that Laughing Leo showed an almost miserly precision in making out his schedule, setting down every item, but obliging the B. B. overseer to do the same after actual inspection and counting. This was the more readily done coming so soon after the round-up, and from the fact that the partners had held their herds well in hand, ready for the worst in case the race should go against them.

The herd of five hundred was counted and receipted for, then put under the care of the cowboys, to be herded on the level before the ranch. where the second installment could be added to it when it arrived. This would save the trouble of looking for brands, and give no possible chance for disputes arising between the rivals.

It was well along in the afternoon when the second bunch of cattle arrived, Basil Brock himself accompanying them. He stiffly saluted his hated rival as he named the number of head, asking for an acknowledgment, or receipt for somany head on account.

"Certainly, when I am satisfied that there are just the number you represent, Mr. Brock," coldly bowed Laughlin. "Bid your men drive them past, and we will count them together."

Basil Brock turned fairly livid at this speech, for polite as were the tones, the suspicion con-

veyed was a bitter insult indeed. "If you insist, of course," he muttered, hoarsely. "But between gentlemen, sir, it is:

hardly customary to-" "I am dealing with you, Mr. Brock," curtly

interrupted Laughlin. "Do you dare to even insinuate that I am no

gentleman?"

"I never insinuate. Just now I am dealing" with you as a man of business. If you don't admire my ways of doing business, you can refuse to pay your debts. Will you give your men the necessary orders, or am I to sue out papers in order to secure my rights?"

"You shall pay a dear price for this insult, Leo Laughlin!" grated Basil Brock as he spurred away to make the necessary arrangements.

"Bully fer you, pard!" chuckled Spread Eagle Sam, fairly boiling over with pure delight. "It does the old heart o' me good to see my pard o' the buffler range on top ag'in! Stick to him, lad! Ram him chuck full o' pins an' needles! Sprinkle him from top to toe with porkypine quills! Stuff prickly p'ars an' centypedes down his back, an' git part way even fer all the dirt he's made us eat while you was onder that durned hoodoo-spell! Good Lawd! I hain't hed so much fun sence you come an' cleaned us all out at the dug-out on the range!"

"It was a spell, I reckon, pard," faintly smiled Laughing Leo. "But the death of poor Tornado brushed it away. From this day on I'm going to spare no one who gets in my way."

It took time to count the herd, which proved to be a little over rather than under the stated number, and it was almost dark when the task was completed and the two bunches formed into one herd. And when Laughing Leo punctiliously noted down the exact number of head, marking them as "first class," handing the receipt to Basil Brock, the latter sneeringly demanded:

"The next time you will not be quite so ready to doubt the word of a gentleman, I'm think-

ing, Leo Laughlin!"

That depends on who claims the title, Basil Brock," was the cold retort. "While I deal with you, neither one side nor the other shall

take aught for granted." Basil Brock frowned and one hand instinctively dropped to the weapons at his waist. But he went no further. Possibly because he was not quite ready to give life for life: and Spread Eagle Sam was watching his every movement

with cat-like closeness. "As I am still your debtor to some extent, Mr. Laugalin, you are comparatively safe in uttering your vile insults. Make out your statement as soon as possible, and send it to me. I will have enough stock collected to wipe out the score, so far as your winnings go. As for the insults-when I am no longer your debtor, I'll

come to you for a final settlement!" "Come with clean hands and a clear record, then, Basil Brock!" retorted Laughing Leo, for the first time that day showing anything like anger or excitement. "Come to me with proof that you are not a cowardly poisoner! Come prepared to defend yourself against the double charge of poisoning my spring and locoing my racer-or you'll come to be punished like a dogmangy, diseased, too utterly contemptible for

aught but kicking off my premises!" "You lie in your throat if you dare accuse me of this!" viciously grated the owner of the B. B.

Ranch, whipping forth a pistol.

Only to have it wrested from his hand by the swift grip of Spread Eagle Sam, who tossed the weapon far away, and would have followed it with the rancher himself, only for the quick interposition of his pard.

"Let him go, Ingalls!" he cried, sharply. "As yet his guilt is only suspected, not proven. When it is proved, I'll punish him, never fear!"

Basil Brock laughed hardly as he smoothed his ruffled garments.

"You shall answer for this with all the rest, Leopold Burvenich. To-morrow I will wipe out your claims, if I have to drive my entire herd over here and leave them for you to select from. And then-Ill kill you or be killed!"

Without another word or waiting for a reply, he turned and galloped away, closely followed

by his herders and overseer. "Durn the horns!" chuckled Spread Eagle Sam, fairly beside himself with delight at the turn affairs had taken. "They're good enough when they ain't nothin' better, o' course, but I wouldn't give this fun fer all the horned critters as run this range from eend to eend an' back ag'in! Good Lawd! jes' to think how long a time we've lost through your bein' under that hoodoo spell, pard!"

Laughing Leo made no reply in words. His face was white and hard, and he did not look like a man who had gained a fortune and sweet

revenge all in a single day.

Spread Eagle Sam saw this, and his own countenance fell, but only for an instant. He was feeling too joyful to permit even a single cloud to gather, and coming closer to his Dandy Pard, he whispered:

"An' the hull of it come 'long o' that dainty little angel, pard! Say Heaven bless Ler, with

the ole man, won't ye?" But Laughing Leo turned abruptly away with-

out a word.

Ingalls gazed after him, half-doubtingly, but then his smile deepened into a laugh as he mut-

tered just above his breath:

"It'll come out jes' so-you mark my words! Pity she's red, but that won't count fer so mighty much ag'inst what she done! An' Injun or no Injun, she's as nigh bein' an angel as they make 'em nowadays! An' bein' a bit of a squaw, so to speak, she won't try to push the ole man out o' the nest-that's the best o' all!"

There was little prospect for sleep for those on The Triangle Ranch that night. The cattle received from Basil Brock, being on a new range

and under strange guards, were naturally restless, and to guard against anything like a stampede, the cowboys were directed to keep on the alert, ready to calm down any fresh uneasiness before it could turn to anything serious.

Both Laughing Leo and Spread Eagle Sam kept on the move through the first part of the night, though both were feeling the want of rest after the sleepless night they had spent over poor Tornado. And shortly after midnight, seeing that the cattle were calming down, they turned in close by, in their clothes, ready to to take saddle at the first alarm.

Despite the exciting and disturbing scenes which they had so recently gone through, both men fell as eep almost as soon as their heads touched their saddle-pillows, and slept heavily for some hours. Then—the earth seemed to tremble, the air to fill with a frightful tumult!

"Up, pard!" yelled Laughing Leo, leaping to his feet and then into the saddle of his horse which stood close by in readiness for just such an emergency as this. "A stampede!"

The warning was not needed, and Spread Eagle Sam was in the saddle almost as soon as his active pard. Nor were the words necessary. That it was a stampede, and no ordinary one, was only too plain.

The thousand head from the B. B. Ranch were tearing away at breakneck speed, bellowing madly, charging blindly, driven mad with fear of some description. Their hoofs rattled together like the crackling of a thousand rifles. Their united trampling fairly made the ground shake and tremble like an earthquake.

"To the right, Sam!" yelled Laughing Leo at the top of his voice as he steadied his frightened horse, then sent him to the left with a vigorous

application of his keen spurs.

If any further words were uttered, they never reached the ears of the giant rancher, for he was already dashing off, urging his big horse at top speed, knowing that nothing could be done until the head of the stampeding herd was reached.

But he required no instructions. He knew well enough that there was only one method of checking a stampede like this before complete exhaustion caused the frightened animals to drop in their tracks, dead or broken completely down. And that was to gain their head, and with voice, whip, and crowding, force the leaders to gradually turn to the right or left from a direct course, keepi g this up until they were fairly "milled," or revolving in a circle.

"Some o' that devil's work," the giant rancher horse on at top speed, skirting the rear of the herd. "That's why he was so keerful to take a receipt afore the hull debt was paid! But we'll

fool him-fool him bad!"

As he passed by several of the cowboys, who seemed startled into confusion by the unexpected break, he shouted for them to come on and imitate him. And little by little he gained on the crowding, bellowing mass, whose speed was thus hampered. And as he dashed along, his whip played with terrible force in the fronts of all the cattle he could reach from the saddle, each blow swinging round from the front, blinding as it fell, sensibly checking the speed of those singled out.

Still on, his clear voice raised to the top notes in a song without words, for right well he knew that nothing is more calming or reassuring to a stampeding herd than the human voice.

Still on, until he could distinguish the front of the stampede. Still on, keeping closely to the skirts, reckless of the keen horns that were more than once swung viciously out toward himself and horse. Still on, singing more loudly, swinging his cruel whip with tireless energy and precision, crowding the cattle to the left, knowing that only by such means could he hope to succeed.

For the moment he had forgotten all about his Dandy Pard, who had ridden off on the opposite flank. But now-a thrill of horror ran through his giant frame as he caught sight of a mounted figure racing along in front of that living avalanche-not trying to turn the leaders, but rather as though fleeing for dear lifeas though fearing to be overtaken and ground to pomace beneath those thousands of hoofs!

"Pard! God above! his critter is limpin'!" gasped Spread Eagle Sam, his face white as that of a corpse, his great eyes almost starting from their sockets, unutterable horror in the gasping words that broke from his choking throat.

By the dim moonlight he could distinguish this: could see the rider, leaning far forward in the saddle, looking back at the coming ava-

lanche as though in a speechless fear! And more—he could see that the horse was losing ground with each painful bound! Scarce twenty yards divided him and the leading cattle! Only a minute more of life-only a minute between him and the most frightful of all deaths!

For a single breath Spread Eagle Sam was paralyzed with horror, but then his voice rose in a maddened roar of mingled horror and savage rage—all the more fierce because he felt only too plainly his utter inability to give suc-

He dropped his whip and drew his pistols, pressing hard upon the routing steers, sending shot after shot at the leaders, bringing one after another in a heap to the ground for their fellows. to leap or stumble over. Still closer he pressed as his pistols rapidly emptied themselves, heeding not his own danger, holding his terrified. horse by the crushing pressure of his knees from flinching, until-

With a shriek of horror the doomed man felt his crippled horse stumble and fall! With a flying leap he shot over its head, only to roll over and over with helpless ankle. And then-

On thundered the living avalanche, over the fallen horse and its rider! On-unheeding the crackling of bones-the bloody spray that answered the stroke of their terrible hoofs!-

Spread Eagle Sam saw the rider fallsaw the maddened cattle plunge blindly over him—then his own horse went down with a horn buried deep behind its shoulder, hurling him half a dozen yards away. He struck fairly on his feet, knife in hand, and slashing like a madman as the cattle came on. He was struck by a grisly front, and knocked to one side—then heknew nothing more until the herd rushed past...

Bruised, ragged, bleeding, he crawled forward. to the spot where the horse and rider had fallen. and paused beside the horrible blotch that alone marked where a human life had gone out, his eyes too full of tears to distinguish aught more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR A PARENT'S SIN.

LAUGHING LEO had no thought of personal danger as he dashed off at the top of his horse's: speed, leaning to the left, he could scarcely have told why, for it was certainly a thing he would never have done had he paused to take a second thought. Comparatively slight as was his experience in the cattle business, he would have known better than to divide his force thus, for in "milling" a stampede the work can be done only from one side.

But a man is hardly ever at his best or keenest when suddenly awakened from a sound slumber in such a manner as this, and Laughing Leo fell. into a very natural mistake, after all.

His only thought was to skirt the frightened herd and check their mad career after some fashion, he scarcely knew or tried to think how during those first few moments.

Urging his good horse on with voice and spur he quickly came up with the rear of the herd. but as his keen gaze roved over them, he saw grated between his teeth as he urged his good that he could do nothing from that position, and wheeled his horse still further to the left, dashing along through the dense clouds of dust cast on the night air by the thousands of clattering hoofs.

> He had covered nearly a mile after this fashion, and was getting fairly well along the flank of the stampede, when he distinguished the clump of timber which told him just how far he had come in that mad, headlong race.

> The frightened cattle were sweeping close by the edge of this, and though it did occur to him that, possibly, he would be safer in swinging around this obstruction. Laughing Leo followed close to the line of trees and undergrowth, his voice lifted in song which seems so utterly out of place in such a thrilling, nightmare scene, but which has been proved the wisest course in such an emergency. And Laughirg Leo never threw more energy into a love song than hedid on this occasion, his bell-like notes rising high at ove even the thunder of hoofs and the savage bellowing.

> Better for him had be ridden on in silence for a short distance further; and yet—it was so-

fated.

He caught sight of several mounted figures near the grove, and naturally took them for some of his cowboys whom he had left on guard over the newly acquired herd. He waved his: hand toward them, crying:

"Follow me, my lads! we'll get them yet!" Even as the words passed his lips the shadowy figures dashed out to meet him, and before he could discover his mistake, the foul deed was done-the noose of a lasso closed around his shoulders, dragging him out of the saddle and hurling him to the ground with stunning force. And, though he knew it not, other lariats caught and held his horse.

Amid the still swirling dust, a horseman leaped to the ground and clutched the young rancher with a grip that would have bothered an entirely uninjured man to cope successfully with. Clutched and held him until a hesty inspection assured him that there was no fear of escape. Until an entirely different fear assailed him.

"Ten thousand curses!" he cried in hoarse, savage tones. "He's dead! Dead-and never knew whose band laid him low!"

Just how long his insensibility lasted, Laughing Leo never knew with anything like certainty. He was not killed by his fall, though sorely bruised and terribly shocked. He had even a faint, dreamy consciousness of being borne through the night air, bound to a saddle and surrounded by laughing, jeering phantems. Butwho these phantoms really were, or whither here was being conveyed, he could not have told.

When the stupor passed away from his brain, and his eyes opened to the light, he stared dizzily about him, feeling like one suddenly wakened

from some frightful dream.

He was in a but of some sort, dimly illumined by the red light of a smoldering fire in one end of the room. He could just distinguish the bowed figure of a man squatting before the coals. faint smoke-wreaths curling around his bare head. Of another form lying stretched on the floor, dead, drunk or sleeping.

He strove to rise to his feet, gasping as if for the lack of fresh air, but in vain. He could not control his limbs. They seemed made of lead, they felt so strangely heavy and inert. He glanced down at them, to see—were those ropes

about his ankles?

He strove to cry aloud, and doubtless be did make some sound, even though his own ears failed to detect it, for the two figures leaped up and one of them flung a dirty, smoky blanket over his head, holding it firmly in place while the other man deftly wrapped a rope about it, effectually blinding the young rancher.

"Who are you? Where am I? What does Nothing could so surely prove that he felt his

it mean?"

Laughing Leo could scarcely recognize his own voice, though he knew he was speaking. The sense of outrage lent him strength, and he strove to burst his bonds, to cast off that suffocating blanket, to leap upon these dastardly enemies and punish them for their deeds, even though death should come to himself the next moment.

But all in vain. That horrible, sickening sensation came over him again, and he felt his

senses reeling—reeling—

It was hours later when he once more began to hear sounds about him. To catch the sound of human voices, to feel the touch of hands and hear the shuffling of human footsteps. Yet this was all. Sight was still denied him, and for a few dizzy moments be fancied he had gone blind. But then he knew a bandage of some sort was covering his eyes; not that heavy, dirty, smoky blanket, for he could breathe, without oppression, and as he rolled his eyeballs downward, he could catch just a gleam of light along his mose.

Then—a pungent, yet not disagreeable smoke filled his nostrils, choking and sending him off into a spasm of coughing, amidst which he dis-

tinguished the words:

"You see-brain grow clear mighty quick, now! Heap good medicine-wake up dead man,

"most!"

"I'll break your infernal back if you lie to me!" snarled another voice—a voice that rung like a death-knell through the brain of the captive—a voice that he recognized on the instant.

"Basil Brock—you treacherous cur!"

Sharp and explosive came the words from the lips of the blinded captive, and a sharp oath

told how hard they hit the mark.

For a brief space there was silence. Laughing Leo, his brain cleared as though by magic, divined the truth of the situation, and knew that at last he had fallen into the hands of the being who hated him worse than death. Knew that he owed his captivity to Basil Brock. Knew that he could hope for nothing more merciful than death, now that he had involuntarily bestrayed his knowledge.

And then he resolved to die, if die he must, bearding and defying his relentless enemy. He would cheat him of part of his revenge!

"Are you too big a coward, Basil Brock, to meet the eyes of a man?" he cried, his voice fairly ringing with scorn. "Must you do muroder, yet fear to look your enemy in the faceand his limbs bound with ropes strong enough. to hold a grizzly bear?"

"E crazy critter, it ain't no Basil Brock that's ketched ye now!" came a deep, grating voice in

response.

"You are not Basil Brock, but Basil Brock is in this room, too cowardly to speak again!" sharply retorted Laughing Leo, feeling almost his usual self again, in all but freedom of limb.

Oh, if he had his liberty for even a single minute! No matter the number of his enemies. No matter his unarmed state. His hands would be equal to the occasion—and he would not die wholly unavenged!

Again a brief silence. Then a short, ugly laugh broke the stillness, followed by the unmistakable tones of Basil Brock, as the bandage was rudely jerked from the eyes of the captive

rancher. "If you will have it so-look!" grated the owner of the B. B. Ranch, bending over his captive, his dark eyes fairly flashing fire, keen and venomous as the glare of an enraged serpent. "And know that your ears have pronounced your doom! Know that in recognizing my voice, you have doomed yourself to death beyond all hope of escape!"

Laughing Leo glanced swiftly, comprehensively about him, taking note of all that the room contained. He saw two stout fellows besides Basil Brock, their faces blackened and covered to the chin with rude masks, their garments being plainly arranged with an eye to avoiding recognition that might prove awkward when the day of settlement should arrive. He

saw that bowed figure again, and a strange thrill ran through his veins as he felt that it must be that of Old John—the father of Redfoot and Meta-lupa!

Meta-lupa! Where was she? Surely she could have had no hand or part in this fresh out-

rage?

The wild fancy was banished as quickly as it flashed across bis brain, and then Laughing Leo gazed straight into the blazing eyes of his vicious enemy, a cold, sneering laugh parting his lips and preceding the words:

"Can you never open your lips without lying, you cowardly cur? I have doomed myself! And, no doubt, you only had me brought herefor such a cur would never dare come even within yelping distance of a free-handed man!simply to shake hands and turn me loose again! You did not mean to murder me in bonds-bah!" and in the extremity of his reckless hatred, Laughing Leo spat full into that bronzed face!

Nothing could have more clearly shown how utterly he had lost all hope of escaping with life.

fate was irretrievably sealed.

Basil Brock started back with a choking cry, one hand whipping a knife from his belt. For an instant the life of Laughing Leo hung trembling in the balance. None knew this better than he, yet he never flinched, never removed his blazing eyes from the livid face of his enemy, though a low, mocking laugh parted his red

For one instant—then Basil Brock hissed out a savage oath as he flung the glittering weapon over his shoulder, narrowly missing one of his disguised allies. And, as though to the more certainly resist temptation, the owner of the B. B, Ranch unbuckled his belt and tossed it to one of the men.

Wiping his face he turned again to his captive, his voice cold as ice, his words even and meas-

ured:

"You think to make me kill you at a single blow, Leopold Burvenich, and thus rob death of half its terrors—thus cheat my vengeance of half its sweetness! But you don't know me yet!"

"Do I not?" coldly retorted the prisoner. "Poisoner of springs! Drugger of horses! Stampeder of cattle! Murderer at heart, though you are by far too great a coward to strike an open blow-too currish to confront or threaten a man without bonds on his limbs! Not know you? I know you only too well! And I am not alone in that knowledge. Spread Eagle Sam knows you just as well-and you will know him far better than you do at this moment, you

Basil Brock laughed harshly, seeming to enjoy this fierce tirade. It proved that his hated enemy could feel, and feel acutely, even though a spice of fear seemed lacking,

Laughing Leo rightly read his feelings, and stopped short. If this sort of retort pleased the rascal, he should have no more of it.

Basil Brock squatted down before his captive; his face hard and merciless, his eyes glow-

ing redly, his voice bitter as aloes.

"Even had I been the author of all you charge me with, Laughing Leo, alias Leopold Burvenich, ex-thief, gambler, foot pad, road-agent, and son of that fiend, the She Wolf! Even if I had done all you hint, still it would be but a drop in the bucket of the bitter black debt I owe you! But I deny all you charge, save capturing and bringing you here for a final settlement."

"Another lie-but go on. Do not let me interrupt you, dear neighbor," softly purred the

young rancher, smiling blandly.

A flash of rage shot across the bronzed face of his captor, and Laughlin laughed anew as he saw how admirably he had read his foe, how much more unpalatable was this cool indifference than his former hot denunciation.

"You play it well, Laughing Leo," snarled Basil Brock, showing his teeth viciously, "but I'll shake your nerve, despite you! I'll make you cringe and cower, make you beg and whine for mercy before I am done with you! But first, let me uncover the black past, and show you just why I have been your enemy."

"Suit yourself, dear lad," drawled Laughing Leo, with a lazy yawn that looked true as nature itself. "If it pleases you, I can bear it. But wouldn't it look a little more filial were you to permit the once gallant and honored Major Wesley Kimball, of the regular service, to rest quiet and undisturbed in his grave?"

"You know-you know who I am?" panted Basil Brock, fairly livid with intense rage. "The un worthy son of a once worthy father.

He is dead and buried. It is not for my hands to open that grave and dishonor his corpse." Gravely, solemnly came these words. Without a trace of sneering. With even a touch of

sadness that was plainly genuine. But the words seemed to set Basil Brock fairly wild with rage and lust of vengeance. He dashed his clinched fists into the calm face before him, cutting the white skin and sending the red blood trickling down in little rills. He tore blindly at his waist, and had a weapon met his hands at that moment, Laughing Leo would surely have died.

"That is like you, coward!" coldly uttered the captive, never flinching, never removing his blazing eyes from the rage-distorted face of his enemy. "Keep on. My hands are bound. I cannot strike you back in return. There is no danger to cow you. Strike-if you dare!"

Those cuttingly scornful words seemed to restore the madman to his senses. He whipped his hands behind him. He sprung to his feet and strode over to where his knife was still sticking in the wall, where he had hurled it a short time before. He sprung back and brought the glittering weapon down, its point directed toward the heart of his helplessly bound prisoner —only to check the weapon before it touched its seeming mark. And a low, harsh laugh broke from his livid lips.

"You see, Leopold Burvenich?" he said, sharply. "You see how little your taunts affect me? I can control my hatred, even when my blade is at your heart! Bah!" with a vicious clicking of his strong teeth. "Did you think to escape me so easily? Did you think to settle the black score with so speedy and painless a death? You poor fool!"

"Not so poor by fifteen hundred head as I was yesterday." laughed the captive, a mocking light dancing in his eyes, a smile playing over his

blood-marked face.

"You are lying, now," harshly laughed Basil Brock. "One thousand head, for which I hold your receipt, are killed or crippled in a stampede which my brain arranged, my money paid for! Your ranch is in ashes, your herds astray, your giant pard—go ask the coyotes!"

"I'll ask your carcass, shortly after my pard

meets you, rather."

Could nothing shake the nerve of this smiling demon? Basil Brock asked himself this, as he with difficulty smothered his hot disappointment. He had counted so much on this

"That meeting will never take place this side the infernal regions, Leopold Burvenich, so you may witness it, after all," he managed to utter without too plainly betraying his disappointment. "Your partner has gone on in advance, but he will not have to wait long before the firm which held the Triangle Ranch here on earth, can be still a firm, in Tophet!

"But before I send you over the range, a few words—confessions, if you like the term better. want you to know all that you owe me, and

just what for.

"You are right. I am the son of Major Wesley Kimball, the man whom your mother, the She Wolf killed. How and why she killed him, does not matter, though if we were alone-never mind," with a dark frown toward his disguised men, who mechanically started toward the door. "Keep your places, fellows. I want you to see how completely I can break down the will of this pretender!"

"Sit down, poor devils," softly uttered Lightning Leo, in a voice that was fairly overflowing with pity. "You will need all the rest you can get, unless your master is lying-according to

custom!"

"You accused me of poisoning your spring, Leopold Burvenich. I denied it then, but I now admit that I hired Red-foot to do the deed. He exceeded his orders, for I only wanted to poison the horse-trough, on a chance of catching your Tornado on your way to the race-meeting.

"It was Red-foot who put the rattle-weed in your racer's manger, but it was I who planned the deed, and my money that paid for its execution. Not simply to insure the winning of the race, for I cared far more for hurting your feelings than I did for the stock, though I kad sworn to strip you of every hoof and horn in

"It was my tongue that poisoned the neighborhood against you. I told them, and backed my word with ample proofs, that you were an outlaw and an escaped felon; that your mother was the notorious Lena Burvenich, who eloped from Morris Kirkendall; but why continue? In one word, all that you have suffered since your coming into this section, has been my work!

"It was Red-foot who stampeded your newlyacquired herd, and he did so under orders from me. I was lying in wait at the grove, meaning to swoop down on the ranch after you passed in chase of the herd, and apply the torch to the

ranch, corrais, out-buildings and-" "I thought you swore they were all in ashes?" coolly interposed Laughing Leo, with a low,

mocking laugh at this slip of the tongue. "They might as well be, for all the good they will ever be to you, laughing demon!" savagely snarled Basil Brock, the deadly fire deepening in his eyes. "Enough talking. You know what I have done. You know how I have avenged my father, thus far. Now I'll tell you what the cap-sheaf of my vengeance shall be.

"You claim to be a man of nerve. I doubt it. but to put the matter forever beyond dispute, I have brought witnesses. I am going to begin with your handsome face, and skin you inch by inch until you beg for mercy like a whining cur under the lash! Then-and not until then-I will send my blade home to your heart!

"Gather up your nerve, Laughing Leo, for in just five minutes by the watch I begin my work! Five minutes, for prayer, if you prefer it!"

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE IS LORD OF ALL. ONLY a hideous blotch on the hoof-scarred plain—only a mass of splintered bones, of man-

gled fiesh, of tattered clothing.

Only this where he had seen a human being fall and be swallowed up by that living avalanche. Only this where he crawled, bruised and half-stunned, his brain alone as clear and active as ever. Only this to meet his agonized gaze as Spread Eagle Sam reached the spot where he believed he had seen his Dandy Pard, Laughing Leo, go down forever!

Even as his eyes swam in his head, and he was turning deathly sick at that horrible sight, the eyes of the giant rancher caught a glimmer of something bright close by his trembling hand, and mechanically he picked it up, to utter a sharp, gasping cry as he saw the bare blade of a long knife—but one entirely strange to him not the knife he felt sure Laughing Leo had

worn that day!

And then his hands groped amid the remains, and a moment later were lifted in the light of the moon, a lock of long hair quivering between them. Human hair, wet with blood, but too long ever to have come from the head of his Dandy Pard! Hair, but black as jet!

And there the frightened herders found the giant rancher on his knees, with hands and face

lifted up toward heaven.

Those wild yells of Spread Eagle Sam, when he fancied he recognized his Dandy Pard in such frightful peril, together with his rapid firing, had brought the half-demoralized cowboys to the spot. Lacking both of their leaders, they were too badly crippled to do much toward checking that furious stampede.

And then they had heard suspicious sounds just before the herd broke away in flight. They knew of the trouble which existed between the B. B. and Triangle Ranches, and expected ugly work to come of it, sooner or later. And as they recalled those suspicious sounds, they instinctively drew together for self-protection.

They were huddled in a clump as Spread Eagle Sam was overthrown, ready to race back to the ranch in case an enemy too strong to cope with successfully should put in an appearance. And thus it was that they came to find the giant rancher as the dust-clouds rose on the night air.

It was not until far along in the day that Spread Eagle Sam came fairly back to his senses after that terrible shock. Came back to hear that Laughing Leo was missing, gone

no one could tell him where!

Spread Eagle Sam stared in mute amaze until the information was repeated; then, with a a hoarse, choking roar he sprung to his feet, his injuries forgotten, only that one strange fact remembered—Laughing Leo was missing!

How? Why? Who was at the bottom of it

all? "That hellion, Basil Brock!" the ex-hidehunter grated, flinging himself upon a fresh

horse and dashing away at top speed for the B. B. Ranch.

It was fortunate, perhaps, for both himself and Basil Brock that Spread Eagle Sam encountered a strong party of horsemen under lead of Finn McAvoy, comprising a number of the ranchers who had taken alarm from that mad stampede, and at once set out to trace it up and offer their services in case they should be needed. Fortunate that Ingalls charged up to them, pistols in hand, glaring about in search of the one who he knew must be at the bottom of all this deviltry. For when Sam failed to find Basil Brock among their number, he grew cool enough to answer the eager questions showered upon him, bluntly charging Basil Brock with starting the stampede and making way with

There were sufficient grounds for this double charge to make the faces of those who listened ed what had occurred, from seeing her dressed sober enough, and when Finn McAvoy proposed a ride of investigation, there was not a tained from Basil Brock. Knowing that she single dissenting voice. And while on the road | must have learned all their plots, they seized to the B. B. Ranch, the Wild Irishman succeeded in getting Spread Eagle Sam to pass his word that he would use no harsh means until Basil Brock had been given every chance

to clear himself.

Laughing Leo.

"Av ye was to jerk the loights out av him, foorst off, sure it's moighty litthle the l'ave o' him could tell ye what's come to the lad, d'ye moind, now?" persuasively concluded McAvoy.

They found Basil Brock at home, overlooking the collection of his stock, cold and composed, altogether unlike a man who had either kidnapped or murdered a hated rival. He coldly denied having been off the place since dusk of the preceding evening. He bade them question his men, if they could not take his unsupported word.

This was done, but nothing was learned to clear up the mystery which enveloped the disappearance of Laughing Leo. And though Spread Eagle Sam threatened to clean out the ranch, from master to slave, from head to tail, he was coaxed away by the glib-tongued Irishman, who seemed strongly interested in solving

the enigma.

that of Spread Eagle Sam that the course of the stampede was followed and the worn-out stock gradually collected. Many of these were killed, many were so utterly broken down as to be literally worthless, but the great majority would be as valuable as ever after rest and food.

"An' av ye kin prove it an' the B. B. Ranch, sure it's their loss an' divil the honest mon in all the Territoory but will make it a p'int to see that same loss made good, d'ye moind, now, honey?"

Spread Eagle Sam frowned faintly. What did he care about the cattle, dead or alive? He had thoughts alone for his Dandy Pard.

Where was Laughing Leo? What strange accident could have befallen him? Alive, he would scarcely remain away so long. Deadsurely there would be some signs of that!

Although the entire herd had passed over the man whom Spread Eagle Sam saw go down with his crippled horse, the remains had been identified as those of the vagabond Indian, Redfoot. And so, had Laughing Leo also fallen a victim to that mad stampede, some signs would remain.

All that day Spread Eagle Sam kept on the move, looking, searching, trying to pick up the trail of his pard or the horse he had ridden on that fatal night; but all in vain. He could track the horse to a point near the timber island, but there all trace was lost.

That day put more than one gray hair into the head of the giant rancher, and when the shades of night began to fall over the earth, he looked years older than he had four-and-twenty hours before.

Although no signs had been discovered, he felt that his Dandy Pard was dead.

"I thank you, gents," he said, gravely, as he stood with bared head before the neighboring ranchers, who were on the point of returning to their own homes. "You've acted kindly, an' this holps to close up a mighty wide gap that was growin' atween us, mainly through the underhan' doin's of Basil Brock. God forgive me ef I wrong him, but I b'lieve he could tell whar my pard is this night! An' ef Leo don't come home afo e day, I'm goin' to call on Basil Brock to find out the reason!"

Nearly all of the ranchers rode away, but Finn McAvov remained, and so did Queen Sate,

with Cicero Boggs as body-guard.

Then one of the cowboys rushed in and spluttered:

"Boss, thar's a gal out thar who says-" Spread Eagle Sam did not wait for the conclusion, but dashed out of the ranch to find Meta-lupa, breathless, terrified, almost too agitated for speech.

"Quick! to horse if ye are men! They are

murdering him!"

"My pard?" hoarsely demanded Spread Eagle Sam, grasping her arm.

"Leo Laughlin-yes! I will guide you-only haste! For the love of kind Heaven, hastehaste!"

Even as the words were trembling on her lips, Spread Eagle Sam drowned them with a hoarse cry that sent every man on the place to preparing their horses and weapons. As for himself, he only stopped to twist one end of a trail rope about the jaw of a horse, then leaped upon its back and urged Meta-lupa away.

She was fully as rapid in her actions, and before Finn McAvoy or the rest could fairly divine what was in the wind, the twain were racing

swiftly away through the night. And as they rode, Meta-lupa explained.

After receiving back the gray horse with which Laughing Leo plucked victory from the very jaws of defeat, she hastened back home, only to find Red-foot and Old John recovering from the drugs which she had administered. She refused to say aught when so fiercely accused, but father and son only too readily divinin the gay garments which Red-foot had oband put her in close confinement.

She told how she worked to free herself, finally succeeding. How she discovered the captivity of Laughing Leo, and the great peril which threatened him. How Basil Brock was at the bottom of it all, and how she had ridden on the "gray ghost" for aid to rescue the young rancher from death, even though in so doing she would be endangering her own father and brother.

"You will spare them?" she faltered, timidly. "They have sinned, but they are very poor, and the gold of that demon tempted them. Show mercy, even as ye hope for mercy when the Great Spirit calls you home!"

Spread Eagle Sam shivered a little as his memory recalled the awful doom which had overtaken one of those for whom her sweet lips pleaded. But he would not tell her this, just

"Ef we're in time-ef they hain't butchered my pard!" he muttered, hoarselv.

"We will—we must be in time! On—we are

only crawling!" Yet the "Gray Ghost" was racing at its best, It was more the work of Finn McAvoy than 'though too badly worn to leave behind such a

desperate rider as the giant rancher, whose spurs dropped blood at every leap of his horse. And behind them raced Finn McAvov, Queen Sate, Cicero Boggs and all of the cow Loys em-

ployed on the Triangle Ranch.

On without break or pause until the rocky barrier was almost gained. Then Meta-lupa reined in her panting steed, leaping to the ground and motioning to Spread Eagle Sam to do the same. He obeyed without a word.

Despite her terrible dread lest she should even now be too late to rescue the young rancher alive from the hands of his bitter eneny, the Indian girl forced herself to await the coming of the main party, in order to warn them of the strict caution which must be maintained. A very few words sufficed for this, then she led the way through the dark passage and up to therude hut, from whence came loug, stern words: "Time is up, you devil! And this is how I

avenge-" With a low scream of mingled terror and joy. Meta-lupa flung open the door and sprung across

the room.

Basil Brock took one fierce glance—then struck viciously at the heart of his bated rival, whipping forth the bloody blade as he fought off the Indian girl with his left hand, striking at her viciously, snarling and cursing more like a maniac than aught sane or human.

Meta-lupa staggered back, just as Spread Eagle Sam leaped across the room, catching Basil Brock up in his mighty grasp, lifting him over his head and hurling him with awful force against the rear wall of the cabin. With a sickening thud he struck against the logs, then dropped to the floor, lying without life or motion, save a spasmodic shivering of his limbs. And with a hand still gripping the haft of his knife, the blade of which was buried in his heart, driven home by the weight of his own body!

The disguised men and Old John strove to escape, but were met at the door by Finn McAvoy and Cicero Boggs. There was a confused struggle which could have but one ending. The men were quickly overpowered, both wounded. And Old John, moaning feebly, was hastily carried away from the cabin, lest the sight of his hurts prove fatal to Meta-lupa.

After all, it might have been worse. Though Basil Brock struck straight for the heart of his rival, Laughing Leo had partly evaded his thrust, receiving only a painful flesh wound as the knife glanced along his ribs. And Metalupa, though severely wounded, would recover

with careful attention. "Which she'll git-God bless the little angel!"

fervently uttered Spread Eagle Sam, when this announcement was made by Finn McAvoy and Queen Sate. "Only fer her, I'd never seen my pard ag'in! Leo, lad, putt it thar! Durn the smoke-cl'ar the track, you!" and the giantrancher plunged blindly out of the room, tears. filling his pop-eyes.

Two litters were made, and on these, swung between horses, Meta-lupa and Laughing Leo were carried to the Emerald Ranch.

Queen Sate insisted upon this being done, both because that was nearer than the Triangle Ranch, and because the wounded couple would need the tender care of a woman for nurse.

"You need have no fear, Mr. Laughlin," she murmured in his ear, a soft blush suffusing her face, a strangely softened light in her great eyes. "The wild Irish girl is dead, and her poor follies are buried with her! Forget them-and forgive!"

She did not pause for an answer, but Laughing Leo knew that her words were sincere. At best her fancy for him had been but little more than that, however it might have grown and strengthened under encouragement.

As yet, Meta-lupa knew nothing of Red-foot's death, or how severely old John had been injured in his effort to escape arrest. It was mainly the doings of Spread Eagle Sam that insured this silence. His big heart had been wholly captured by the "little Injun gal" to whose courage and devotion he owed the life of his Dandy Pard.

And Sam took care that Laughing Leo should fully understand all that he owed to Meta-lupa before he left him, fairly installed at the Emerald Ranch. He told how vainly he had sought for a trace of the missing man, and how he was about giving over in despair when Meta-lupa brought word of his peril, begging for aid to rescue him.

"Mebbe she's a bit off-color, lad," he added, earnestly. "But she's clean white at heart! Ef you're sech a durned fool, be-blizzered ef the ole man don't snuggle up to her his own self-so

thar !" Perhaps it was this that rendered Laughing

Leo so grave after the departure of his partner. Perhaps it was this that made him ask for Queen Sate, and inquire if he might speak a few words in private with Meta-lupa. And perhaps it was this that made the wild Irish girl smile and nod her head knowingly as she ran down-stairs to meet and greet Cicero Boggs, who was just alighting at the door.

Meta was dressed and reclining in an easychair, when Laughing Leo was left alone with her. She looked even more beautiful than usual.

he thought, as her large eyes sunk beneath his gaze, as the color came and went in her cheeks, distinctly visible though they were brown.

"I have not thanked you yet for all you have done for me, Meta," he said, softly, kneeling beside her chair and taking possession of her hands, holding them between his own, despite the trembling effort she made to release them.

"Please don't-I want no thanks," she murmured, turning her face away, her breath coming quick and unevenly. "It was nothing-"

"Nothing, Meta?" with a touch of reproach in his voice. "Nothing to save my honornothing to save my life?"

"I meant—I didn't mean—"

"All this you did, Meta," his voice growing deeper, more tender. "All this-yet I am not satisfied. I want you to do more-much more! Meta, I want you to love me, even as I love you! I want you to be my bride—my wife! Will you, darling?"

A gasping cry parted her lips, and there was a look almost of horror in her eyes as they turn-

ed to meet his passionate look.

"Oh, no-you must not-you forget!" she panted.

"All save that I love you, Meta. All save that I want you for all my own-my little wife," he earnestly repeated.

With an effort that shook her weakened frame severely, Meta-lupa overcame her agitation. Her voice was comparatively steady as she said:

"Do you know who and what I am? An Indian girl—a squaw!"

"I love you, Meta!" was his only reply. "Worse than that—listen!" and she shivered anew as she forced herself to add the words, how bitter to her pride, not even the man who knelt at her side, clasping her trembling hands

so lovingly, could know. "It was my father who prepared the little sack of herbs you found with the other poison in the spring! It was the hand of my brother who buried the poison there!"

"And it was their daughter, their sister, who came to warn me of danger—who saved my life. This wipes out the other, Meta!"

"It was my poor, misguided brother who put that awful weed in the manger from which

your horse ate it!" "And it was his sister who risked her life to make amends! His sister who brought me another horse by which I defeated my enemy! His sister, who dared do this-what not another woman in all the territory would have dared attempt!"

Meta-lupa caught her breath, her head leaning back against the cushions. It was so hard to speak thus! So hard to hold out against this handsome, loving man! For-she knew it now, if she had succeeded in deceiving herself up to this period—she loved him passionately!

Yet she would not yield—she could not yield

with aught untold.

"He-my brother-run off your cattle. He was to help burn your property. Help capture and torture you. My brother, remember!" "I love you, Meta," was his sole response in

words.

"It must not be! You are mad! Think what your people will say!"

"Spread Eagle Sam is the only one I have to consider, little pet, and he vows that if I don't win and wed you, he'll do it himself!" Leo laughed, rising until he could turn her face fairly toward his, adding gravely, earnestly: "If you hate me, Meta, close your eyes, and] will go away, never to trouble you again. If not-Meta!" he cried, his voice trembling with great joy. "Meta, you do love me, then?"

"Have I not proved it, Leo?" she faintly murmured.

And then-

CHAPTER XX.

WHEREIN CICERO "GETS THERE!" "NEVER a word will I speak that can light up your understanding, Leo Laughlin!" and Queen Sate nodded her head so vigorously that her hat almost flew off. "And it's with a white feather I'll be presenting ye, as a token that you're afraid to trust to the word of a woman! Sure it's not the little boy beside ye that stopped to think twice before he spoke once—and that once a good round yes!"

Spread Eagle Sam grinned broadly as Queen Sate changed her portentous frown into an approving smile, as her great eyes turned from Laughing Leo to himself, the "little boy" in

question.

There was something peculiar in the wind,

from all appearances.

It was the second day after the rescue at Old John's hut, and Laughing Leo had been over to the Triangle Ranch, receiving cattle from the B. B. Ranch. Queen Sate came riding posthaste after them, saying that important business awaited their arrival at Emerald Ranch. But what that business was, she flatly declined to tell them. She even went further than this: stepping clear over the bounds of reason, Leo thought.

Leo and Ingalls were asked to pledge their

words to see and listen in perfect silence until permission was given them to speak. They were on no account to address a single person whom they might see.

Spread Eagle Sam quickly agreed. There was a peculiar twinkle in his pop-eyes that aroused the suspicions of his pard that the giant rancher was at least partially in the se-

"Do it, pard!" muttered Sam, with a nudge of his elbow as they rode along side by side. "Never say no to a woman. They cain't do no more then make a barbycue out of us, anywayan' what's that 'mount to?"

Laughing Leo submitted, only to have a fresh condition imposed on him by the laughing, mischievous Queen Sate. As they alighted before the Emerald Ranch, she barred his way with a folded silken scarf, declaring that he must submit to being blindfolded.

As he had yielded once, so he yielded now. And with the light entirely shut out from his eyes, he was guided by Queen Sate into the house, And he heard Spread Eagle Sam mutter barely | ing cry! above his breath in startled tones:

"Good Lawd! Who'd 'a' thunk it!"

"Quiet-silence-remember your pledge, for her sake!" Queen Sate breathed softly into Leo's ear, as her little hands clung tighter to his arm, guiding him to a chair and forcing him into it.

Like one in a dream, almost, Laughing Leo submitted. And then, without warning, there rose the clear, distinct voice of Cicero Boggs:

"Friends all! I have a little story to relate to you, which I am vain enough to think will interest you deeply.

"Years ago, there lived in Chicago a man by the name of Briscoe Davidson. Never mind his station in life, his business, his relatives, his personal peculiarities: we have only to do with the manner of his starting out in a new life.

"Briscoe Davidson committed murder and robbery, under peculiarly atrocious circumstances, and though it was months before the crime was fairly traced to his door, the chain of evidence was at last complete. All that was lacking was the criminal; he had fled, and though the entire force was on the lookout for him, he was not found.

"About a month ago, a hint—scarcely strong enough to be called a clew-caused my chief to send me up in these parts to look after the longabandoned murder case. There was a whisper Davidson in this section, though the chief could give me no positive information. I was to study up the old case, and do the best I could.

"As a blind, giving me something to ask people questions about while covertly pursuing my real case, the chief picked up some papers relating to a long-missing heir to a vast fortune in the Old Country. I was to pretend to be looking for Melchoir Parkindale, or his heirs, while in reality hunting down this ghost of a clew to Briscoe Davidson.

"And now, see how curiously the affair turns out: In looking for another, I found Briscoe Davidson. In finding Briscoe Davidson, I found out all about Melchoir Parkindale. And in discovering the assassin of Melchoir Parkindale, I came across the heirs to the fortune in far-away England."

"Remember your oath!" whispered Queen Sate in the ear of Laughing Leo as he gave a start. "Patience—patience and hope!"

"It was only on his death-bed that I discovered Briscoe Davidson," resumed Cicero Boggs, after a brief pause. "It was only when he realized that his death was inevitable that I could frighten or coax him into making a full confession of the murder for which he was wanted in Chicago. He did confess, and I have that confession, written out in full and signed before witnesses. But let that pass.

"Imagine my surprise when Briscoe Davidson began to speak of Melchoir Parkindale! Began to mutter and rave of another atrocious crime, which had troubled him a thousand times more than all his other crimes put together.

"The story is too long to give in detail, just now, and a condensed report will serve our ends

just as well. "Briscoe Davidson and his son Austin made the acquaintance of Melchoir Parkindale many a long mile from here, when they were on the brink of starvation. Parkindale treated them as though they were his blood relations, and for nearly a year they lived at his expense. Thenwhile drinking, and crazed with liquor, a quarrel arose which resulted in the death of Parkindale. And to cover this crime, father and son robbed the house, set it on fire, and with the most precious possession of the murdered man, fled through the night.

"If suspected, they never knew it. If followed, they were never overtaken. And so they came here, haunted by the still older crime, hearing that the bloodhounds of the law were still searching for the man who killed Anthony Deacon in

Chicago. "Came here, not as they left the blazing home of their last victim. Came here to be known as Old John and Red-foot, his son."

A shiver ran over the frame of the blinded

rancher, though he had long since foreseen what the end of this story must be. A shiver of pain for what poor Meta-lupa must be suffering; of honest indignation toward the man who could thus coolly lay bare her wounds.

"Patience—and hope!" Queen Sate breathed in his ear. "She is here, and watching you. She is smiling, and not in tears. Patience!"

"As he lay gasping out his life, Briscoe Davidson told me that he had suffered terrible remorse over killing Melchoir Parkindale, which he solemnly declared was the result of an accident, and not through ill-will or by intention. He said that only the fear of death led him to cover his crime by fire, but that not even this dread could induce him to make all sure by adding another death to the score; and though he might be carrying his own condemnation with him, he could not help carrying away Melchoir Parkindale's little daughter, Meta-"

Queen Sate was still banging to the arm of Laughing Leo, but at this juucture be sprung to his feet, casting her aside, tearing the bandage into a room where he felt there were others. from his eyes, to stagger back with a low, chok-

Was it? Could it be?

Still weak from her wound, Meta-lupa occupied the same easy-chair in which he saw her when Laughing Leo so simply answered her objections to his suit. Meta-lupa—but no longer with the brown face and hands of an Indian girl-Meta-lupa, white and fairskinned, looking doubly beautiful in civilized garb. Meta-lupa smiling, joyous-eyed, seeing only the man she loved with all her heart—the man who had wooed and won her while thinking her what she seemed, one of a despised race, the daughter and sister of criminals!

Spread Eagle Sam caught his pard by the arm and gave him a half-savage shake as he saw the maiden sink back on her pillow, turning pale as death, frightened by the way in which her lover shrunk back.

"Take her, you dumb critter! Take her while you kin-fer I'm gittin' most monstrous hungry my own self! Take her, or I will."

The spell was broken. With a low, passionate cry, that was almost a sob, Leo Laughlin sprung forward and dropped on his knees beside the couch of the wounded girl-the girl who had risked her life to preserve his-the girl who had won his love while seeming an Indian squaw.

And Spread Eagle Sam drove all but those two out of the room, slamming the door behind him. And then his shrill eagle-cry rose and of some one seeing and recognizing Briscoe grew until it fairly made the house-roof quiver!

> Strange as this story was, it was nevertheless proven true after careful investigation. With the death of Briscoe Davidson, "Cicero Boggs," as he persisted in calling himself, devoted a month to verifying the confession made by Old John, and finally came back with ample proofs that Meta-lupa was indeed the heiress to the Parkindale fortune.

Meantime, a consultation of ranchers was held over the Brock affair, the two men captured at the time their master met his death by his own knife, confessing all. And after due deliberation, the council decided that the B. B. Ranch must pay the Triangle Ranch the full number of head won by "the gray ghost" over Red Rover, destroying the receipt given for the herd which Red-foot afterward stampeded. When this was done, Finn McAvoy assumed charge of the ranch until the relatives of Basil Brock could be communicated with. In the end the property was sold, and the name of the ranch changed—to what? The "C. B. Ranch!"

For "Cicero Boggs" finally "got there!" And Queen Sate settled down into the very model of a wife and mother. No longer the wild Irish girl. No longer the ally of the cattlethieves.

To this day she never tires of thanking Wirt

Dalton for saving her from the downward trail. Laughing Leo wedded Meta Parkindale, and though it was a hard wrench for Spread Eagle Sam to part with his "Dandy Pard," he was partially consoled by their promise to spend a goodly portion of each year at the ranch, now wholly owned by the ex-bide-hunter.

"Tell ye what, pard!" he whispered confidentially as they parted for the first time after the wedding. "They ain't many he-critters as kin lay over my ole pard, Laughing Leo, but-you mark my word, an' mark it down good an' deep! Ef we all o' us live long enough, I'll make a better man of your fu'st boy then even his pap ever was-so thar!"

"That may well be, old friend," huskily uttered Laughlin, gripping that honest hand tightly. moisture filling his eyes. "If I could only blot

out the past!" "Blot out nothin'!" indignantly cried Spread Eagle Sam. "Want to spoil all the fun I'll hev to think over when you're gone. A better man, I said, not a gooder man! An' I'm boun' to do it! Look at the stock on both sides, will you? You—the best man o' the same inches I ever met! She-brave as a tigress, yet sweet as honey b'iled down, an' true as steel, pure as refined gold!

"I kin do it, pard! An' I will, too!"

THE END.

EADLE'S DIME LIBRARY.

BY WILLIAM R. EYSTER.

- 145 Pistol Pards; or, The Silent Sport from Cinnabar.
- 160 Soft Hand, Sharp; or, The Man with the Sand.
- 182 Hands Up; or, The Knights of the Canyon.
- 192 The Lightning Sport.
- 211 The Two Cool Sports; or, Gertie of the Gulch.
- 229 Captain Cutsleeve; or, The Little Sport.
- 268 Magic Mike, the Man of Frills.
- 300 A Sportain Spectacles; or, The Bad Time at Bunco.
- 333 Derringer Dick, the Man with the Drop.
- 344 Double Shot Dave of the Left Hand.
- 356 Thr e Handsome Sports; or, The Double Combination.
- 375 Royal George, the Three in One.
- 396 The Piper Detective.
- 402 Snapshot Sam; or, The Angels' Flat Racket.
- 429 Hair Trigger Tom of Red Bend.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

- 8 The , Headless Horseman; A Strange Story of Texas.
- 12 The Death-Shot; or, Tracked to Death.
- 55 The Scalp Hunters. A Romance of the Plains.
- 66 The Specter Barque. A Tale of the Pacific.
- 74 The Captain of the Rifles; or, The Queen of the
- 200 The Rifle Rangers; or, Adventures in Mexico.
- 208 The White Chief. A Romance of Northern Mex-
- 213 The War Trail; or, The Hunt of the Wild Horse.
- 218 The Wild Huntress; or, The Squatter's Vengeance.
- 228 The Maroon. A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah.
- 234 The Hunter's Feast.
- 267 The White Squaw.

BY CAPTAIN FREDERICK WHITTAKER.

- 39 The Russian Spy; or, The Starry Cross Brothers.
- 65 The Red Rajah; or, The Scourge of the Indies.
- 69 The Irish Captain. A Tale of Fontency.
- 96 Double Death; or, The Spy of Wyoming.
- 98 The Rock Rider; or, The Spirit of the Sierra. 108 The Duke of Diamonds.
- 115 The Severed Head; or, The Secret of Castle Coucy.
- 132 Nemo, King of the Tramps.
- 159 Red Rudiger, the Archer.
- 174 The Phantom Knights.
- 187 The Death's Head Cuirassiers.
- 193 The Man in Red.
- 206 One Eye, the Cannoneer.
- 211 Colonel Plunger; or, The Unknown Sport.
- 215 Parson Jim, King of the Cowboys.
- 226 The Mad Hussars; or, The O's and the Mac's.
- 230 The Flying Dutchman of 1880.
- 242 The Fog Devil; or, The Skipper of the Flash.
- 247 Alligator Ike; or, The Secret of the Everglade.
- 253 A Yankee Cossack; or, The Queen of the Nihilists.
- 265 Old Double-Sword; or, Pilots and Pirates.
- 272 Seth Slocum, Railroad Surveyor.
- 277 The Saucy Jane, Privateer.
- 284 The Three Frigates; or, Old Ironsides' Revenge.
- 290 The Lost Corvette; or, Blakeley's Last Cruise.
- 295 Old Cross-Eye, the Maverick-Hunter.
- 303 Top-Notch Tom, the Cowboy Outlaw.
- 810 The Marshal of Satanstown; or, The Cattle-Lifters' League.
- 326 The Whitest Man in the Mines.
- 378 John Armstrong, Mechanic.
- 406 Old Pop Hicks, Showman.
- 412 Larry Locke, the Man of Iron.

BY C. DUNNING CLARK.

- 164 The King's Fool.
- 183 Gilbert the Guide.

BY NEWTON M. CURTISS.

120 The Texan Spy; or, The Prairie Guide. 254 Giant Jake, the Patrol of the Mountain.

BY JACKSON KNOX-"Old Hawk."

- 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective. 424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

398 Sleepless Eye, the Pacific Detective. 432 The Giant Horseman.

BY PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

57 The Silent Hunter. The Big Hunter; or, The Queen of the Woods.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON.

- 176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.
- 194 Don Sombrero, the California Road Gent.
- 202 Cactus Jack, the Giant Guide.
- 219 The Scorpion Brothers; or, Mad Tom's Mission.
- 223 Canyon Dave, the Man of the Mountain.
- 227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
- 237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
- 245 Barranca Bill, the Revolver Champion.
- 258 Bullet Head, the Colorado Bravo.
- 263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer. 266 Leopard Luke, the King of Horse-Thieves.
- 271 Stonefist, of Big Nugget Bend.
- 276 Texa: Chick, the Southwest Detective. 285 Lightning Bolt, the Canyon Terror.
- 291 Horseshoe Hank, the Man of Big Luck.
- 305 Silver-Plated Sol, the Montana Rover.
- 311 Heavy Hand; or, The Marked Men.
- 323 Hotspur Hugh; or, The Banded Brothers.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, The California Bloodhound.
- 297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
- 385 Wil! Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
- 405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
- 415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
- 427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.

BY SAM S. HALL-"Buckskin Sam."

- 3 Kit Carson, Jr., the Crack Shot.
- 90 Wild Will, the Mad Ranchero.
- 178 Dark Dashwood, the Desperate.
- 186 The Black Bravo; or, The Tonkaway's Triumph.
- 191 The Terrible Tonkaway; or, Old Rocky and his Pards.
- 195 The Lone Star Gambler; or, The Magnolias Maid.
- 199 Diamond Dick, the Dandy from Denver. 204 Big Foot Wallace, the King of the Lariat.
- 212 The Brazos Tigers; or, The Minute Men.
- 217 The Serpent of El Paso; or, Frontier Frank.
- 221 Desperate Duke, the Guadaloupe "Galoot." 225 Rocky Mountain Al; or, The Waif of the Range.
- 239 The Terrible Trio; or, The Angel of the Army.
- 244 Merciless Mart, the Man Tiger of Missouri.
- 250 The Rough Riders; or, Sharp Eye the Scourge.
- 256 Double Dan the Dastard; or, The Pirates.
- 264 The Crooked Three.
- 269 The Bayou Bravo; or, The Terrible Trail.
- 273 Mountain Mose, the Gorge Outlaw.
- 282 The Merciless Marauders; or, Carl's Revenge.
- 287 Dandy Dave and his Horse, White Stocking.
- 293 Stampede Steve; or, The Doom of the Double Face.
- 301 Bowlder Bill; or, The Man from Taos.
- 309 Raybold, the Rattling Ranger.
- 322 The Crimson Coyotes; or Nita the Nemesis.
- 328 King Kent; or, The Bandits of the Bason. 342 Blanco Bill, the Mustang Monarch.
- 358 The Prince of Pan Out.
- 371 Gold Buttons; or, The Up Range Pards.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON.

- 13 Pathaway; or, Nick Whiffles, the old Nor'west Trapper.
- 17 Nightshade; or, The Robber Prince.
- 22 Whitelaw; or, Nattie of the Lake Shore.
- 37 Hirl, the Hunchback; or, The Santee Swordmaker.
- 58 Silver Knife; or, The Rocky Mountain Ranger
- 70 Hydrabad, the Strangler.
- 73 The Knights of the Red Cross; or, The Granada Magician.
- 163 Ben Brion; or, Redpath, the Avenger.

BY FRANCIS JOHNSON.

- 25 The Gold Guide; or, Steel Arm, Regulator.
- 26 The Death Track; or, The Mountain Outlaws. 123 Alapaha the Squaw; or, The Border Renegades:
- 124 Assowaum the Avenger; or, The Doom of the Destroyer.
- 135 The Bush Ranger; or, The Half-Breed Rajah.
- 136 The Outlaw Hunter; or, The Bush Ranger. 138 The Border Bandit; or, The Horse Thief's Trail.

BY GEORGE ST. GEORGE.

- 296 Dnncan, the Sea Diver.
- 417 Tucson Tom; or, The Fire Trailers.

BY COLONEL THOMAS HOYER MONSTERY.

- 82 Iron Wrist, the Swordmaster.
- 126 The Demon Duelist; or, The League of Steel.
- 143 The Czar's Spy; or, The Nihilist League.
- 150 El Rubio Bravo, King of the Swordsmen.
- 157 Mourad, the Mameluke; or, The Three Swordmasters.
- 169 Corporal Cannon, the Man of Forty Duels.
- 236 Champion Sam; or, The Monarchs of the Show.
- 262 Fighting Tom, the Terror of the Toughs. 332 Spring-Heel Jack; or, The Masked Mystery.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

- 390 The Giant Cupid; or Cibuta John's Jubilee.
- 422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.
- BY ISAAC HAWKS, Ex-Detective.
- 232 Orson Oxx; or, The River Mystery. 240 A Cool Head; or, Orson Oxx in Peril.

BY PROF. J. H. INGRAHAM.

- 113 The Sea Slipper; or, The Freebooters.
- 118 The Burglar Captain; or, The Fallen Star.
- 314 Lafitte; or, The Pirate of the Gulf. 316 Lafitte's Lieutenant; or, Child of the Sea.

BY GUSTAVE AIMARD.

- 15 The Tiger Slayer; or, Eagle Heart to the Rescue.
- 19 Red Cedar, the Prairie Outlaw. 20 The Bandit at Bay; or, The Prairie Pirates.
- 21 The Trapper's Daughter; or, The Outlaw's Fate. 24 Prairie Flower.
- 62 Loyal Heart; or The Trappers of Arkansas. 149 The Border Rifles. A Tale of the Texan War.
- 151 The Freebooters. A Story of the Texan War. 153 The White Scalper.

Adams.

MISCELLANEOUS.

- 6 Wildcat Bob, the Boss Bruiser. By Edward L. Wheeler.
- 9 Handy Andy. By Samuel Lover.
- 10 Vidocq, the French Police Spy. Written by himself.
- 11 Midshipman Easy. By Captain Maryatt. 32 B'hoys of Yale; or, The Scrapes of Collegians.
- 66 Wide Awake, the Robber King. By Frank Dumont. 68 The Fighting Trapper. By Captain J. F. C.
- 76 The Queen's Musketeers. By George Albany.
- 78 The Mysterious Spy. By Arthur M. Grainger. 102 The Masked Band; or, The Man without a Name. By George L. Aiken.
- 110 The Silent Rifleman. By H. W. Herbert. 125 The Blacksmith Outlaw; or, Merrie England.
- By Harrison Ainsworth. 133 Rody the Rover. By William Carleton.
- 144 The Hunchback of Notre Dame. By Victor Hugo.

140 The Three Spaniards. By Geo. Walker.

- 146 The Doctor Detective. By George Lemuel.
- 152 Captain Ironnerve, the Counterfeiter Chief. 158 The Doomed Dozen. By Dr. Frank Powell. 166 Owlet, the Robber Prince. By Septimus R.
- Urban.
- 179 Conrad, the Convict. By Prof. Gildersleeve. 190 The Three Guardsmen. By Alexander Dumas. 261 Black Sam, the Prairie Thunderbolt. By Col.
- Jo Yards. 275 The Smuggler Cutter; or, The Cavern in the Cliff. By J. D. Conroy.
- 312 Kinkfoot Karl, the Mountain Scourge. By Morris Redwing. 330 Cop Colt, the Quaker City Detective. By Charles
- Morris. 350 Flash Falcon, the Society Detective. By Weldon J. Cobb.
- 353 Bart Brennan; or, The King of Straight Flush. By John Cuthbert. 366 The Telegraph Detective. By George Henry Morse.

410 Sarah Brown, Detective. By K. F. Hill.

A new issue every Wednesday.

428 The Flying Glim; or, The Island Lure. By Leon

Beadle's Dime Library is for sale by all Newsdealers, ten cents per copy, or sent by mail on receipt of twelve cents each. BEADLE & ADAMS. Publishers, 98 William Street, New York.

ADLE'S DIME LIBRARY.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

2 The Dare Devil; or. The Winged Sea Witch. 85 The Cretan Rover; or, Zuleikah the Beautiful. 89 The Pirate Prince; or, The Queen of the Isle.

94 Freelance, the Buccaneer. 103 Merle, the Mutineer; or, The Brand of the Red

Anchor.

104 Montezuma, the Merciless. 109 Cap ain Kyd, the King of the Black Flag. 116 Black Plame; or The Sorceress of Hell Gate.

121 Tue Sea Cadet; or, The Rover of the Rigoletts. 128 The Chevalier Corsair; or, The Heritage of Hatred.

131 Buckskin Sam, the Texas Trailer. 134 Darkey Dan, the Colored Detective. 139 Fire Eye; or, The Bride on a fire aneer.

147 Gold Spur, the Gentleman "om Taras. 155 The Corsair Queen; or, The yosi ... he Sea. 162 The Mad Mariner; or, Dishonor and Disowned 117 Dashing Dandy; or, The Hotspur of the Hills.

168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot. 172 Th Black Pirate; or, The Mystery of the Golden Fetters.

177 Don Diablo, the Planter-Corsair.

181 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Nemesis of the

184 The Ocean Vampire; or, The Heiress of Castle Curse. 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.

198 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer of the Sea. 20% The Gambler Pirate; or, The Lady of the La-

goon. 210 Buccaneer Bess. the Lioness of the Sea. 216 The Corsair Planter; or, Driven to Doom. 220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.

224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer. 231 The Kid Glove Miner; or, The Magic Doctor. 235 Red Lightning the Man of Chance. 248 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.

255 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter. 259 Cutlass and Cross; or, the Ghouls of the Sea. 281 The Sea Owl, or, The Lady Captain of the Gulf. 307 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Bahamas Water Wolves.

318 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers. 325 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Bay Hermits.

329 The League of Three; or, Buffalo Bill's Pledge. 336 The Magic Ship; or, The Sandy Hook Freebooters.

341 The Sea Desperado, 346 Ocean Guerrillas; or, The Phantom Midship man.

362 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or Oath Bound to Custer. 384 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast. 369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea. 373 The Sailor of Fortune; or, The Barnegat Bay

Buccaneer. 377 Affoat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator. 388 The Giant Buccaneer; or, The Wrecker Witch. 393 The Convict Captian; or, The Battles of the

Buccaneers. 399 The New Monte Cristo. 418 The Sea Siren; or, The Fugitive Privateer.

425 The Sea Sword; or, The Ocean Rivals. 430 The Fatal Frigate.

BY OLL COOMES.

7 Death Notch, the Destroyer. 43 Dakota Dan the Reckless Ranger. 44 Old Dan Rackback, the Great Extarminator.

46 Bowi -- Knife Ben, the Nor'west Hunter. 48 Idaho Tom, the Young Outlaw of Silverland. 51 Red Rob, the Boy Road-Agent.

99 The Giant Rifleman; or. Wild Camp Life. 137 Long Beard, the Giant Spy.

148 One-Armed Alf, the Giant Hunter.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES.

278 Hercules Goldspur, the Man of the Velvet Hand. 294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.

321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit. 335 Flash Dan, the Nabob.

340 Cool C nrad, the Dakota Detective. 347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand." 352 The Desperate Dozen.

365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow. 374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.

382 The Bonanza Band. 392 The Last Bonanza. 400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.

407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick. 413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.

421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow. 434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS.

5 The Fire Fiends; or, Hercules, Hunchback. 95 Azhort, the Axman; or, The Secrets of Ducal Palace.

100 The French Spy; or, The Bride of Paris. 167 The Man of Steel. Tale of Love and Terror. 185 Man Spider; or The Beautiful Sphinx. 238 Hank Hound, the Crescent City Detective. 280 The Masked Mystery; or, The Black Crescent.

288 Electro Pete, the Man of Fire. 806 The Roughs of Richmond.

313 Mark Magic, Detective. 334 The Cipher Detective; or, Mark Magic's New Trail.

843 The Head Hunter; or, Mark Magic in the Mine. \$57 Jack Simons, Detective.

BY BUFFALO BILL (HON. W. F. CODY).

52 Death-Trailer, the Chief of Scouts. 83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, The Knights of the Overland.

243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart. 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler. 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West. 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.

397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Baver's Trail. 401 The One-Armed Pard; or, Red Retribution in Borderland.

414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective. ...

BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR.

92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King. 142 Captain Crimson, the Man of the Iron Face.

156 Velvet Face, the Border Bravo. 175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.

188 The Phantom Mazeppa.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

28 Three-Fingered Jack, the Road-Agent. 30 Gospel George; or, Fiery Fred, the Outlaw 40 The Long-Haired Pards.

45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot. 47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.

50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport. 64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot. 67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.

71 Captain Cool Blade; or, The Mississippi Man Shark. 88 Big George; or. The Five Outlaw Brothers.

105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Rocky Mountain Detective. 119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters

127 Sol Scott, the Masked Miner. 141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.

154 Joaquin, the Saddle King. 165 Joaquin, the Terrible. 170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.

180 Old '49; or. The Amazon of Arizona. 197 Revolver Rob; or, The Belle of Nugget Camp.

201 The Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt, 233 The Old Boy of Tombstone. 241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.

249 Elephant Tom, of Durango. 257 Death Trap Diggings. 283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.

286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand. 292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout. 302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules. 317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.

324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary. 331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport. 339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter, 345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.

351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective. 355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete. 360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown. 367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.

372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record. 379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwa-

387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills. 395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.

403 The Nameless Sport. 409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle. 416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.

426 The Ghost Detective. 433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.

209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince. 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime. 48 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.

274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport. 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.

298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods. 308 Hemlock Hank. Tough and True. 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League. 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.

337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.

348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut. 368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.

BY MAJOR DANIEL BOONE DUMONT.

383 Silver Sam, the Detective. 389 Colonel Double-Edge, the Cattle Baron's Pard. 411 The White Crook; or, Old Hark's Fortress.

420 The Old River Sport; or, A Man of Honor.

BY NED BUNTLINE.

14 Thayendanegea, the Scourge; or, The War-Eagle. 16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet. 18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Gueen of the Isle. 23 The Red Warrior; or, The Comanche Lover.

111 The Smuggler Captain; or. The Skipper's Crime. 122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.

270 Andros the Rover; or, The Pirate's Daughter. 361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.

61 Captain Seawaif, the Privateer.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

27 The Spotter Detective; or, The Girls of New York.

31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning. 33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine. 34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw. 35 Kentuck, the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the

Mines. 36 Injun Dick; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.

38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip. 41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake. 42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of New York.

49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Queen of the Kanawha. 56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, The Madman of the

Plains. 59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw. 63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of the

Gulf. 72 The Phantom Hand; or, The Fifth Avenue

Heiress. 75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison, Stage and Street.

77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress of Buenaventura.

79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy. 81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.

84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three. 91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter. 93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.

97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred. 101 The Man from New York. 107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.

112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective. 130 Captain Volcano; or, The Man of the Red Revolver.

161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Man. Hunt. 173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.

196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen. 203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery. 252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl. 320 The Genteel Spotter; or, The Night Hawk of

New York. 349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent. 354 Red Richard; or, The Brand of the Crimson

Cross. 363 Crowningshield, the Sleuth; or. Pitiless as Death. 370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End. 376 The Black Beards; or, The High Horse on the

Rio Grande. 381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, the Detective.

384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked from the Rockies to New York.

391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective. 408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.

419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detec-423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.

BY COLONEL DELLE SARA.

53 Silver Sam; or, The Mystery of Deadwood City. 87 The Scarlet Captain; or, The Prisoner of the Tower.

106 Shamus O'Brien, the Bould Boy of Glingal.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

1 A Hard Crowd; or, Gentleman Sam's Sister. 4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai. 29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime. 54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.

80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf. 114 The Gentleman from Pike. 171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.

207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare. 251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard. 280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.

299 Three of a Kind; Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport. 338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.

359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo. 380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent, 404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff. 431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.

LATEST AND NEW ISSUES.

432 The Giant Horseman; or, Tracking the Red Cross Gang. By George C. Jenks. 433 Laughing Leo; or, Spread Eagle Sam's Dandy Pard. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.

434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective. By Capt. Howard Holmes.

435 The One-Armed Buccaneer; or, The Havenless Cruiser. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham. Ready February 23.

436 Kentucky Jean, the Sport from Yellow Pice; or, Blue-eyed Belle of Bended Bow. Ready March 2.

437 Deep Duk, the Silent Sleuth; or, The Man of Two Lives. By William H. Manling. Ready March 9. 438 Oklahoma Nick; or, Boomer Balt's Little Sur

prise Party. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.

Ready March 16. A new issue every Wednesday.

Beadle's Dime Library is for sale by all Newsdealers, ten cents per copy, or sent by mail on receipt of twelve cents each.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS, 98 William Street, New York,

ADLE'S DIME LIBRARY.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

2 The Dare Devil; or. The Winged Sea Witch. 85 The Cretan Rover; or, Zuleikah the Beautiful. 89 The Pirate Prince; or, The Queen of the Isle.

94 Freelance, the Buccaneer. 103 Merle, the Mutineer; or, The Brand of the Red

Anchor.

104 Montezuma, the Merciless. 109 Cap ain Kyd, the King of the Black Flag. 116 Black Plame; or The Sorceress of Hell Gate.

121 Tue Sea Cadet; or, The Rover of the Rigoletts. 128 The Chevalier Corsair; or, The Heritage of Hatred.

131 Buckskin Sam, the Texas Trailer. 134 Darkey Dan, the Colored Detective. 139 Fire Eye; or, The Bride on a fire aneer.

147 Gold Spur, the Gentleman "om Taras. 155 The Corsair Queen; or, The yosi ... he Sea. 162 The Mad Mariner; or, Dishonor and Disowned 117 Dashing Dandy; or, The Hotspur of the Hills.

168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot. 172 Th Black Pirate; or, The Mystery of the Golden Fetters.

177 Don Diablo, the Planter-Corsair.

181 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Nemesis of the

184 The Ocean Vampire; or, The Heiress of Castle Curse. 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.

198 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer of the Sea. 20% The Gambler Pirate; or, The Lady of the La-

goon. 210 Buccaneer Bess. the Lioness of the Sea. 216 The Corsair Planter; or, Driven to Doom. 220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.

224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer. 231 The Kid Glove Miner; or, The Magic Doctor. 235 Red Lightning the Man of Chance. 248 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.

255 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter. 259 Cutlass and Cross; or, the Ghouls of the Sea. 281 The Sea Owl, or, The Lady Captain of the Gulf. 307 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Bahamas Water Wolves.

318 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers. 325 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Bay Hermits.

329 The League of Three; or, Buffalo Bill's Pledge. 336 The Magic Ship; or, The Sandy Hook Freebooters.

341 The Sea Desperado, 346 Ocean Guerrillas; or, The Phantom Midship man.

362 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or Oath Bound to Custer. 384 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast. 369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea. 373 The Sailor of Fortune; or, The Barnegat Bay

Buccaneer. 377 Affoat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator. 388 The Giant Buccaneer; or, The Wrecker Witch. 393 The Convict Captian; or, The Battles of the

Buccaneers. 399 The New Monte Cristo. 418 The Sea Siren; or, The Fugitive Privateer.

425 The Sea Sword; or, The Ocean Rivals. 430 The Fatal Frigate.

BY OLL COOMES.

7 Death Notch, the Destroyer. 43 Dakota Dan the Reckless Ranger. 44 Old Dan Rackback, the Great Extarminator.

46 Bowi -- Knife Ben, the Nor'west Hunter. 48 Idaho Tom, the Young Outlaw of Silverland. 51 Red Rob, the Boy Road-Agent.

99 The Giant Rifleman; or. Wild Camp Life. 137 Long Beard, the Giant Spy.

148 One-Armed Alf, the Giant Hunter.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES.

278 Hercules Goldspur, the Man of the Velvet Hand. 294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.

321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit. 335 Flash Dan, the Nabob.

340 Cool C nrad, the Dakota Detective. 347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand." 352 The Desperate Dozen.

365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow. 374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.

382 The Bonanza Band. 392 The Last Bonanza. 400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.

407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick. 413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.

421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow. 434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS.

5 The Fire Fiends; or, Hercules, Hunchback. 95 Azhort, the Axman; or, The Secrets of Ducal Palace.

100 The French Spy; or, The Bride of Paris. 167 The Man of Steel. Tale of Love and Terror. 185 Man Spider; or The Beautiful Sphinx. 238 Hank Hound, the Crescent City Detective. 280 The Masked Mystery; or, The Black Crescent.

288 Electro Pete, the Man of Fire. 806 The Roughs of Richmond.

313 Mark Magic, Detective. 334 The Cipher Detective; or, Mark Magic's New Trail.

843 The Head Hunter; or, Mark Magic in the Mine. \$57 Jack Simons, Detective.

BY BUFFALO BILL (HON. W. F. CODY).

52 Death-Trailer, the Chief of Scouts. 83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, The Knights of the Overland.

243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart. 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler. 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West. 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.

397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Baver's Trail. 401 The One-Armed Pard; or, Red Retribution in Borderland.

414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective. ...

BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR.

92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King. 142 Captain Crimson, the Man of the Iron Face.

156 Velvet Face, the Border Bravo. 175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.

188 The Phantom Mazeppa.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

28 Three-Fingered Jack, the Road-Agent. 30 Gospel George; or, Fiery Fred, the Outlaw 40 The Long-Haired Pards.

45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot. 47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.

50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport. 64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot. 67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.

71 Captain Cool Blade; or, The Mississippi Man Shark. 88 Big George; or. The Five Outlaw Brothers.

105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Rocky Mountain Detective. 119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters

127 Sol Scott, the Masked Miner. 141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.

154 Joaquin, the Saddle King. 165 Joaquin, the Terrible. 170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.

180 Old '49; or. The Amazon of Arizona. 197 Revolver Rob; or, The Belle of Nugget Camp.

201 The Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt, 233 The Old Boy of Tombstone. 241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.

249 Elephant Tom, of Durango. 257 Death Trap Diggings. 283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.

286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand. 292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout. 302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules. 317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.

324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary. 331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport. 339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter, 345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.

351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective. 355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete. 360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown. 367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.

372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record. 379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwa-

387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills. 395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.

403 The Nameless Sport. 409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle. 416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.

426 The Ghost Detective. 433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.

209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince. 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime. 48 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.

274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport. 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.

298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods. 308 Hemlock Hank. Tough and True. 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League. 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.

337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.

348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut. 368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.

BY MAJOR DANIEL BOONE DUMONT.

383 Silver Sam, the Detective. 389 Colonel Double-Edge, the Cattle Baron's Pard. 411 The White Crook; or, Old Hark's Fortress.

420 The Old River Sport; or, A Man of Honor.

BY NED BUNTLINE.

14 Thayendanegea, the Scourge; or, The War-Eagle. 16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet. 18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Gueen of the Isle. 23 The Red Warrior; or, The Comanche Lover.

111 The Smuggler Captain; or. The Skipper's Crime. 122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.

270 Andros the Rover; or, The Pirate's Daughter. 361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.

61 Captain Seawaif, the Privateer.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

27 The Spotter Detective; or, The Girls of New York.

31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning. 33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine. 34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw. 35 Kentuck, the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the

Mines. 36 Injun Dick; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.

38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip. 41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake. 42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of New York.

49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Queen of the Kanawha. 56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, The Madman of the

Plains. 59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw. 63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of the

Gulf. 72 The Phantom Hand; or, The Fifth Avenue

Heiress. 75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison, Stage and Street.

77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress of Buenaventura.

79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy. 81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.

84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three. 91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter. 93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.

97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred. 101 The Man from New York. 107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.

112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective. 130 Captain Volcano; or, The Man of the Red Revolver.

161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Man. Hunt. 173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.

196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen. 203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery. 252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl. 320 The Genteel Spotter; or, The Night Hawk of

New York. 349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent. 354 Red Richard; or, The Brand of the Crimson

Cross. 363 Crowningshield, the Sleuth; or. Pitiless as Death. 370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End. 376 The Black Beards; or, The High Horse on the

Rio Grande. 381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, the Detective.

384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked from the Rockies to New York.

391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective. 408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.

419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detec-423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.

BY COLONEL DELLE SARA.

53 Silver Sam; or, The Mystery of Deadwood City. 87 The Scarlet Captain; or, The Prisoner of the Tower.

106 Shamus O'Brien, the Bould Boy of Glingal.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

1 A Hard Crowd; or, Gentleman Sam's Sister. 4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai. 29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime. 54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.

80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf. 114 The Gentleman from Pike. 171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.

207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare. 251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard. 280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.

299 Three of a Kind; Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport. 338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.

359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo. 380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent, 404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff. 431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.

LATEST AND NEW ISSUES.

432 The Giant Horseman; or, Tracking the Red Cross Gang. By George C. Jenks. 433 Laughing Leo; or, Spread Eagle Sam's Dandy Pard. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.

434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective. By Capt. Howard Holmes.

435 The One-Armed Buccaneer; or, The Havenless Cruiser. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham. Ready February 23.

436 Kentucky Jean, the Sport from Yellow Pice; or, Blue-eyed Belle of Bended Bow. Ready March 2.

437 Deep Duk, the Silent Sleuth; or, The Man of Two Lives. By William H. Manling. Ready March 9. 438 Oklahoma Nick; or, Boomer Balt's Little Sur

prise Party. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.

Ready March 16. A new issue every Wednesday.

Beadle's Dime Library is for sale by all Newsdealers, ten cents per copy, or sent by mail on receipt of twelve cents each.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS, 98 William Street, New York,



ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XXXIV.

Published Every Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers, 98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., February 9, 1887.

Ten Cents a Copy. \$5.00 a Year.

No. 433



A STRANGELY COLD SMILE CREPT INTO THE HANDSOME FACE OF LEO LAUGHLIN AS HE GRASPED HIS PARTNER BY THE ARM AND LED HIM TO WHERE THE TWO SACKS OF POISON STILL LAY.

Spread Eagle Sam's Dandy Pard.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR., AUTHOR OF "OLD '49," "MONTE JIM," "NOR' WEST NICK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DUSKY GUARDIAN.

"STEADY, old fellow—steady! You'll never be fit for a philosopher to ride unless you learn to curb your appetites a little more judiciously."

The horse, a rich, deep buckskin, darkly mottled over the hips, gave a slight whimper at the sound of that gay, bantering voice, pricking back its ears for a moment, then stretching out its slender neck with an impatient tug at the bit shaking its head as though protesting against this unwonted restraint.

The rider laughed his tones low and musical.

The rider laughed, his tones low and musical, yet with something in them that was far akin from mirth. With hardly a seeming effort, that small gloved hand drew the tossing head back and down until the foam-fringed jaw fairly touched the sweat-darkened counter.

"Misery loves company, Mott," with a repeti-

tion of that peculiar laugh. "True, you're only a horse; a pretty good plug, after a homely, every-day fashion; but never likely to set the river afire. Only a horse; willing, faithful, without a blemish or a fault—save that you call Laughing Leo your master! And right there you make a mighty mistake, Mott—a monstrous mistake, old fellow!"

Mott turned his head as far as the taut reins would permit, a low whimper shaking his thin,

distended nostrils.

Leo Laughlin leaned forward and patted his arched neck, slackening the reins as he did so.

"That puzzles your matter-of-fact brain, eh? You scent the cool water. You know that the spring is only a few rods away. Your throat is hot and half-filled with dust. You know that a few big strides would carry you to the trough where you could bury your nose to the eyes in water cool and sparkling as ever came to light through the medium of the old oaken bucket. Yet you are held back. You are snubbedthat's the word, Mott. Snubbed! Hadn't I ought to know it?"

An echo of bitterness that was almost fierce ran through the short laugh that followed the words. Deep wrinkles marked the white brow, and a reddish light glowed and sparkled in those

bright blue eyes.

Could one have caught the words without seeing the author, one would have decided that the speaker was airing his own grievance. And yet, Leo Laughlin was hardly a student of human nature one would deliberately pick out as a fit subject for snubbing.

A man rarely shows off to better advantage than when in the saddle; and Leo Laughlin was a natural born equestrian, which is very far removed from the prim, precise model of the rid-

ing-schools.

He was a comparatively youthful man, graceful in figure, with long, rounded limbs that bespoke more than an ordinary share of muscular strength and activity. In face he was handsome, his complexion so pure, his skin so finegrained, his color so delicate and perfectly blended as to convey a disagreeable impression of effeninacy; but only at the first glance.

A second look was sufficient to show the real manhood underlying this foppish exterior. A third was warning enough for any wise man.

A neat mustache shaded, without entirely concealing, the moist red lips, now slightly parted in a half-smile, half-sneer, affording a glimpse of white, even teeth. His eyes were blue, large and lustrous. His nose long and straight, with thin nostrils. His chin full without fatness, cleft in the middle with an oblong dimple that carries with it a warning to knowing eyes.

Over his nut-brown hair, short and curling in tiny rings, soft and glossy as ever maiden wore, rested a broad-brimmed hat of pearl gray felt, its band of leather fastened with a bright golden

buckle in true cowboy style.

Apart from this badge of his new profession, Laughing Leo's garb was one better fitted for the city than the plain, of costly material without being in the least "flashy" or "loud." A valuable diamond flashed in the golden ring that secured his scarf. A slender chain of fine links crossed his vest. On his slender, neatly shaped feet were riding-boots of patent leather, and kid gloves covered his hands.

A rather strong contrast was afforded by the belt of silk webbing which encircled his middle, supporting a pearl-handled knife and a brace of revolvers, cartridges for which filled woven loops all around the belt. In a leather scabbard, attached to the saddle, hung a magazine rifle,

balanced by a neatly coiled lasso.

"Ay! snubbing with a big S, o'd fellow!" the rider added with a half-defiant toss of his head as he permitted his steed to move on again. "It's been my staple food since the first week I struck this range, and I'm actually growing fat on it! No thanks to them, though!" with sudden bitterness, a frown corrugating his brows. hips. "A friend, or a fool. One man has no "They meant it to sicken, if not to kill. They license to go for my hair, with a warning that counted on its freezing me out, hide, hoof and horns. They look on us as interlopers, old fellow, and they want our room much more than they do our company. Not very flattering, is

Mott uttered a low whimper as the gloved hand smoothed his neck, but the way in which he stretched out his long neck and champed at the bit, snuffing the grateful scent of cool water in advance, showed plain enough where his thoughts were. And, unreasonable though it was, this seemed to irritate his master. His red lips curled half-savagely as his armed heel pricked the willing steed, sending him forward like an arrow fresh loosed from the string, only to draw him up short as the watering-

place was reached.

"Patience, old fellow," with a short, hard laugh, steadying the angrily tossing head with an iron grip. "Kicking against the first prick? That's more foolish than your master! I've taken dose after dose with all the grace and meekness of an angel in modern dress. It was bitter, but I smiled blandly as I bowed my thanks. Why? Well-right or wrong I struck out a new trail, and unless Satan forbids, I'll follow it out to the end, as I began.

'It comes hard—mighty hard, though! Just 'rider came dashing up.

as you find it hard to be denied your fill of the cool water that sparkles beneath your thirsty muzzle, old fellow," still restraining the chafing animal. "Just to let you sympathize with your master, Mott!

"You see what seems perfect bliss almost within reach of your dust-parched muzzle. You feel that life has nothing more delicious to offer. You could curse me with hearty good will for holding you back from the feast, had you the power of mortal tongue. Yet I-bah!" and Leo Laughlin suddenly loosened the reins, permitting his steed to dip its velvety muzzle deep in the rude drinking-trough before it.

"I ask your pardon, good fellow," laughing softly as he bent over in the saddle and gently patted the arched neck. "Promise that you'll never whisper my folly, even to your closest friend, and I'll never try to teach you boy-

cotting at second hand again!"

There was a deep flush upon his smoothamends, Laughing Leo permitted his horse to usual throbbings. drink unrestrained, more freely perhaps than he would otherwise have done, in his heated

And there was a faint trace of sheepishness in the quick glance which he cast around him, like one who fears being observed by others.

It was a pleasant scene enough, even at that season of the year when the grass of the cattle range is converted to sun-cured hay, looking dead and worthless.

On all hands save one, the ground stretched away in gently undulating swells, broken here and there by an occasional clump of bushes, a few trees, or one of those curious bowlders, huge and massive, which whisper of the faraway ice age.

A point of rocks, covered over in part by creepers and stunted shrubbery, extended from the broken range. From this point came a spring of water, known far and wide to man

and beast.

The water first gushed forth from its hidingplace several yards above the level of the plain, and the hand of man had fashioned it for the greater convenience of those who thirsted, both

two and four-footed.

A basin had been hewn out of stone, covered over with a heavy slab, leaving simply a spout from which to drink, or to catch the water in a cup, thus securing it from pollution by birds or beasts. From this spout the waste water fell into a hollow trough, leading down the slope skin. until the stream fell with a musical murmur into a great log bollowed out and strongly supported by rocks on each side to prevent its being tipped over. A notch cut in the lower end of this trough permitted the superfluous water to flow over and spread out into a miniature pond a few vards below.

But Leo paid no attention to these details. The spring was on his own range, and he had

long since grown familiar with them.

With a sudden sense of shame he had banished his unhealthy musings, and though he instinctively cast a swift glance about to make sure his folly had no observers, the musical plash of the falling water was already reminding him that his throat was parched with dust and heat, after his hot day's work on the range. And he was swinging himself from the saddle when he uttered a sharp exclamation and shading his eyes with arched palm, gazed keenly over the level plain toward the declining sun.

One hand instinctively dropped to his belt as he distinguished the shape of horse and rider rapidly drawing near. This much he could make out, but the rider was coming in a straight line with the sun, and that brilliant light par-

tially blinded him.

"Only one—and sending a yelp before him!" he muttered, stepping aside from his horse and standing with hands lightly resting upon his he means war!"

Quietly, easily, without a trace of boasting in the tones, however vauntingly the assertion may

appear in cold type.

Swiftly the stranger came on, gesticulating excitedly with arms, and shouting forth words that Laughing Leo vainly tried to catch with understanding at first, thanks to the distance and the plashing waters. But then—

"Do not drink—for your life!"

Laughing Leo gave a sharp cry, not so much at the words themselves, though they were startling enough in all conscience; but because he recognized the one who sent that warning in advance.

"Meta-lupa—the red-skin beauty!" he muttered, striding forward as though to meet the new-comer, but pausing, as there came a pant-

ing cry:

"Your horse—stop him!"

Laughing Leo turned mechanically toward the buckskin, who just then turned away from the trough, taking a step or two in order to nip a mouthful of the grass growing hard by.

"If you wish, Meta, though there's little fear of his straying beyond easy recovery," said Laughlin, doffing his hat with a bow as the

"You-have you drank the water? Speakquick!" gasped the girl, bending forward and catching him by the arm with a grip that seemed almost frenzied.

"Not here, this evening," replied the young man, his eyes filled with surprise, not wholly

free from admiration. "Thank Heaven!"

The words came with a gasp of intense relief, and the little brown hand relaxed its grasp. The lithe figure swayed, and seemed on the point of falling, when Laughing Leo caught her in his strong arms, lifting her from the blanket which formed her only saddle.

He was in no great haste to lower her completely to the ground. He seemed rather to draw her closely to his breast, though this might have come from his natural bewilderment at her

strange address. But let that be as it may, the girl-woman deftly

slipped from his grasp, one hand catching hold shorn cheeks, as though he felt ashamed of his of her panting steed's mane, the other pressed brief pettishness, and in his desire to make tightly over her heart, as though to still its un-There was more than surprise in the eyes of

Leo Laughlin as he gazed at the girl before him, though it could hardly be termed love, either. For this girl-woman was brown as a berry, and wore the garb of an Indian squaw.

Yet she formed a striking, even beautiful

picture, just then.

A girl-woman; she might with equal propriety be termed either, for while she was clearly in her 'teens, her form was rarely developed, and seemed fairly perfect in her wild yet becoming and picturesque garb.

Her hair was black as the wing of a raven, hanging far down her back in two massive braids, tied at the ends with scarlet ribbon. A band of beaded doeskin encircled her temples, and aided in securing her hair, for this natural covering was all that shielded her head from the

sun. Her eyes were large, full, black as slees', though now partly shaded by long lashes and drooping lids, like one almost overcome with emotion. Her features were clear-cut and regular as a cameo, free from the disfiguringly high cheekbones of her race, from the flattened nose and wide mouth of the modern Indian. Only for her color and her dress she might easily have passed for one of untainted white blood. Even her complexion seemed purer and her skin thinner, showing the workings of the warm blood beneath far plainer than in an ordinary red-

Her outer garb was composed almost entirely of doe or fawnskin, showing that soft, creamy yellow peculiar to the Indian tanned skins.

There were heavily beaded moccasins on her feet, and embroidered leggings, of the same material, wrapped about her legs and secured by beaded bands just below the knees. A skirt of fawnskin, wrought elaborately with beads and silk, came considerably below her knees. A tight-fitting waist, or basque, with long sleeves, completed her outward attire.

A belt of webbing encircled her round, trim waist, supporting a knife and double-action revolver. It was also plentifully supplied with cartridges, both for the pistol and for the repeating rifle which was secured in a sling to her

horse.

Laughing Leo stood gazing at this strange creature, whom he had met more than once before, though never under circumstances so curious as these. He was at a loss what to say or do, and felt just a little relieved when Meta-lupa gave a shiver, standing erect, her lustrous eyes fixed upon his as she uttered:

"You have not tasted the water? You are

sure?"

"Quite sure," with a faint smile. "My throat is parched—"

"Better that than death!" was the startling response. "And your horse?"

"Is happy, as you see. But what do you mean, Meta?"

"That your horse is poisoned—that there is death in the water you were about to drink! Thanks to Heaven I came in time!"

Laughing Leo was grave enough now. His face paled, his eyes burned with a steely light,

his white teeth clicked together sharply. With a strong effort he controlled the hot rage that leaped up within him, and spoke calmly, stead-

"I am not quite sure I understand your meaning."

"The spring is poisoned—poisoned by your enemies, who seek to remove you from their path!"

Even yet Leo Laughlin could not realize the truth. This was such a frightful crime, and its results might be so vast and widespread. For he was not the only one who used the spring. It was known throughout those vast ranges, and whoever happened to pass near rarely did so without turning aside for a cooling draught.

He knew he had enemies, bitter and unscrupulous-past events only too plainly indicated as much-but surely they would not attempt his

death by such frightful means!

The Indian girl was watching him keenly, and a slight frown came into her face as she read his thoughts aright in his changing countenance.

Sharp and almost imperiously she cried, pointing to Mott:

"You doubt my warning: watch. Ha!" The dappled buckskin was no longer feeding. He was standing with drooping head, but as those words passed her lips, his head was flung up with a strange, groaning sound. His back arched, his stomach tucked up, and his limbs began to quiver spasmodically.

With a cry of angry alarm, Laughing Leo started forward, only to pause as Meta-lupa grasped his arm with her little hand, saying: "Too late! See!"

The tortured animal reared up on its hind feet, convulsively pawing the air, foam streaming from its distended jaws. One moment, then it turned partly around, falling heavily upon its side, its legs outstretched and quivering convulsively, a hollow groan coming from its lungs.

"Be careful!" cried Meta-lupa, as Laughlin broke away from her restraining grasp and rushed to the side of the dying animal. "Beware its teeth—it may poison you!"

There was a strange eagerness in her warn ing, both in voice and manner, which Laughing Leo could not centirely miss noticing, even in that moment of excitement. She sprung before him, one meccasined foot pressing lightly on the neck of the animal, ready to restrain any dangerous struggles on its part.

Laughlin bent over the poor creature, gazing into its eyes, but not for long. Past experience told him that mortal aid was in vain. The noxious drug had done its work only too well, thanks to the great thirst of the animal. And then, as a fresh spasm tortured the poor creature, Laughing Leo drew his keen knife, and with a swift stroke drove the sharp point through the spine at the base of the skull. One slight quiver, and poor Mott was off duty foreever!

Meta-kapa withdrew her foot and stepped back, a slight shiver agitating her lithe figure, but her voice was steady as she said:

"It was well and mercifully done. The poor beast was past saving, and death came as a merciful boon."

"My knife would be just as sure, but not so painless, were my hand on the dastardly whelp who peisoned the spring!" sternly grated Laughlin, his blue eyes ablaze as he turned toward the Indian maiden, adding: "You know him? Give me his name!"

Meta-lupa shrunk back, a strange pallor com- ! ing into her face, her figure shivering and drooping like one smitten with sudden fear. And until then the man did not realize how harshly, how fiercely he had spoken and looked.

Instantly his frowns vanished, and his voice grew musical:

"Little woman, you are not frightened? You "do not think I am threatening you? You, who saved my life-who drew me back from suffering the death of a sheep-killing cur? Metalook up and—"

Instead, she drew back from the arm that would have encircled her shrinking form, speaking hurriedly, brokenly:

"No, I am not afraid-I did not thinkonly, I cannot tell you who did this foul deed!" "Yet, you knew of it? You came to warn me? Meta, is the wretch who would commit such a foul deed worth the defense of those sweet lips?"

"I saved you-I would have saved any other whom I found in a like peril," uttered the maiden, forcing herself to meet his half-passionate, half-reproachful gaze.

"And some day I hope to thank you for that act, more fittingly than I can thank you now, with poor Mott lying there before my eyes," was the grave response. "Add one more great boon, Meta. Tell me whose hand put poison in the spring. Tell me how you discovered it."

Meta-lupa no longer shrunk away. She stood | to such morsels. erect, her dark eyes filling with light, her red lips firmly compressed as she met his glowing gaze. A brief space thus, then she stepped forward until their hands might have met, speaking slowly, distinctly:

"You believe I saved your life?"

Laughing Leo glanced toward his dead horse as he spoke:

"There lies the proof-or was the poison simply placed in the horse trough?" "The poison was intended for your lips," was

the response. "Tell me the name of the wretch who-" "You say I saved your life," interposed Metalupa, a swift motion just brushing his lips with

the tips of her brown fingers. "If you are grateful for that act, reward me-will you?" Laughing Leo read her meaning aright, but under the circumstances he could not hesitate.

"With my life, if you will accept it, Meta," he said, gravely. He smiled faintly as he saw the red blood leap-

ing swiftly beneath the brown skin. The black eyes quavered for a moment, but then bravely met his blue orbs as the girl-woman said: "I ask my life, instead. I have already risked it to save yours; do not make me forfeit it by

telling you more." "I swear no one shall ever be the wiser for the words you may speak, Meta. Only a word-only

a name! Surely you would not shield such a dastardly cur?"

The Indian girl hesitated, her dark eyes seeking the ground, her brown fingers nervously intertwining. Laughing Leo saw his advantage, and pressed it hard.

"None but a coward would strike at a life after such a fashion! And surely you can trust me to guard your life against all such curs, Metalupa? You can trust me?" he added, his voice growing soft and musical as he gently touched her hands.

Only to have them swiftly withdrawn as the Indian girl sprung to the side of her horse, one hand raised in warning as the young man took a step toward her. Her dark eyes were glowing brightly, her red lips paling with earnestness as

she motioned him back.

"Meta-lupa asks no man to protect her—and least of all a rich and proud pale-face!" the maiden cried, her voice clear as a silver bell. "I have warned you, and that I spoke truly, let of alabaster, swelling out into a matchless bust. yonder carcass bear witness. I said that I risked | A figure such as one instinctively attributes to life in coming here. I told you it would be my the warrior-queen of the Iceni, or the fabled death to say more. Yet you persisted. You-"

"I ask your pardon," with a low, grave bow. "I was too deeply excited to fully realize what was saying or doing. I thank you for what you have done, and hope some day to show you the full extent of my gratitude. Until then-"

"I ask no thanks," was the softer response. "I learned of this black deed through accident, and I came here at once to post a warning over the poisoned waters. I found you—and was fortunate in saving your life. That is all. It needs no thanks."

Laughlin laughed softly as he murmured: "I am so utterly worthless, then?"

The moment the words passed his lips, he would have given much for the power of recalling them. He saw Meta-lupa flush hotly, then turn ashen pale. He saw something like tears dim her bright eyes, but before he could see more, before he could utter another word, the Indian maiden sprung lightly upon her horse, wrenching its head around, striking it sharply with her moccasined heel, dashing away over the plain at full speed.

And Laughing Leo stood in the red rays of the declining sun watching her, a frown upon his white brow, a troubled light filling his eyes.

He felt that he had given a poor reward for

his life!

CHAPTER II. A TENDERFOOT IN TROUBLE.

"Bur, Miss Sate-" "But, Mr. Basil Brock-I'll have no buts!" with a light laugh. "It's the coming race I want to talk about, and not such soft, silly nonsense. And there it goes again! Now you're mad!"

"Not mad, Miss McAvoy, but hurt; hurt far more than words can tell," came in low, intense accents as the speaker bent a reproachful gaze on the gay, flighty creature riding beside him.

He gave a little start as Miss Sate uttered a sharp exclamation, reining in and twisting her rosy, mischievous face over one shoulder to call

"Dad, did you ever? Mr. Brock swears he's hurt so bad he can't begin to express it! Horrible! Who'll we get to ride, now?"

"Maybe it's a suit of his clothes he'll be after lendin' ye, darlin', and then we'd have a jockey up that the divil himself couldn't bate, let alone that grinnin' baboon of a Laughlin," chuckled Finn McAvoy, his huge figure shaking with mirth at the comical idea.

Miss Sarah McAvoy joined in the laugh, and Basil Brock also made an effort in that direction, but it was a very faint and unsuccessful one. And if there wasn't the flavor of an oath under his tongue, it must have been because his sense of taste had long since grown accustomed | the hot irons.

Very brief was the young lady's laughter, then her face grew grave and anxious and her great blue eyes opened widely as they roved keenly over the figure of her cavalier.

"Would you, Mr. Brock? I wonder-would they be big enough?"

It was no use! Try as he might, Basil Brock could not remain out of humor with Sate Mc-Avoy when she strove to bring a smile to his face, and the laugh with which he joined Finn McAvoy was a genuine one this time, though a flush came to his bronzed cheeks; for where is the lover who would not prefer being at least a size or two larger than his "adorable divinity?"

And Basil Brock was very much in love with this gay, tantalizing creature, very much in earnest with his wooing: too much so, rerhaps.

Even the meekest of maidens might object to being courted right under the keen, watchful eyes of a father, out on a treeless plain, with the evening sun lighting up every action. And Sate McAvoy was far from being of the meekest, as even her ardent lover was forced to admit. More times than one he had caught himself wishing she had just a trifle less spirit.

Sarah's mother must have been a rarely beautiful woman, for certainly grim, gaunt, giant Finn McAvoy could have bestowed little of those charms that rendered "Queen Sate" a | from her face. toast throughout all those vast ranges; unless it

was her superb figure, taller far than that of her sex in general.

A perfect Amazon she looked, sitting her spirited horse with unstudied grace and natural ease, her large, yet perfectly proportioned figure revealed rather than masked by her snugly-fitting habit of seal-brown goods. One woman in a thousand both as to face and form.

A face such as you might find beside the waters of Killarney, or in the peat-flavored atmosphere of a mountain shieling; a face with the great blue eyes, the matchless complexion of milk and roses, contrasting charmingly yet strongly with the jetty black hair.

A rose-lipped mouth, a trifle wide, a thought too full, it may be, for statue que beauty, but doubly charming and seductive in one of warm flesh and blood. A nose just tip-titled enough to give an enemy the ghost of an excuse for whispering "pug." A chin that betrayed strength and self-will. A throat like a column Semiramis.

Little wonder, then, that Basil Brock was over head and ears in love with his fair neighbor, or that he improved every opportunity for pressing his suit, knowing as he did that Finn McAvoy was wishing him success with all his heart.

And, so far as outward appearances went, the fair Sarah might have gone further to fare worse. Basil Brock was a good-looking young man, well-educated, and fairly well off in the matter of this world's goods, with the best of projects for ranking high among the "cattle barons" of the Northern Ranges long before his head should begin to show the first frosts of coming age.

Fortune had favored him mightily since his entrance into the stock-raising field. Everything his hands touched seemed to turn to gold, and his most reckless ventures were the very ones to "pan out" the most profitably.

He was no "carpet knight," though he could have held his own in almost any society. He was a magnificent rider, judged by the roughand-ready rules of the range. He had nerve and grit enough for any ordinary emergency. He could handle a "rope" with the best of his men, and was "no slouch" with rifle or revol-

Little wonder, then, when he came a-wooing, that Finn McAvoy greeted him with smiles and a warm clasp of the hand. Little wonder that "Queen Sate" showed no slight fancy for the dashing young stockman, since his tastes seemed to chime in so perfectly with her

own. But Basil Brock was far from satisfied. His wooing had not lacked for heat or ardency, but this day he felt that he was full as far from complete success as when he took the first step toward the prize. With an inward curse, he felt that he was still further away.

It was the season of the "Fall round-up," and this was the concluding day of that arduous task.

For two weeks past master and men had been working hard, gathering in the scattered "bunches" of cattle, marking, branding, culling out for market such as had been left over from the earlier "drive."

According to custom, every ranch within miles and miles had been represented, all working together, chosen riders from each ranch taking turns in "cutting out" stock bearing their respective brands, until the last bunch was attended to. Then the unbranded stock—the Mavericks without mark-were put up at auction, the proceeds to revert to the Stockgrowers' Association, and the cattle themselves to be caught, thrown, marked and seared with

It was to witness this sport-for sport it is, barbarous though it sounds to the cold earthat Sate McAvoy accompanied her father to the round-up that day. And under her sparkling eyes the warm-blooded ranchers had fairly outdone themselves in their exploits. And when Queen Sate herself cast a rope—true and deftly as the surest hand among them all—the heavens echoed again with wild, enthusiastic cheers. And had she expressed the wish, Queen Sate might have walked from the round-up to the distant McAvoy Ranch without once touching the ground with her trim feet. One beautyintoxicated rancher declared as much, and offered his body as the first stepping-stone, her light laugh being drowned by the eager shouts of her admirers who seconded the unique proposal. Only one voice was silent. Only one face remained cold and even cynical.

She saw that face now, and the smiles faded from her face. Her armed heel savagely pricked her steed, and with a wild plunge sideways he almost upset the horse ridden by Basil Brock. With slackened reins she darted away over the plain, and though Brock set out in hasty pursuit, foolishly fancying her horse had broken away and was beyond her control, she kept her distance until she drove that haunting face from her mind, that pale, almost haggard look

She turned toward her agitated lover, smiling

brightly, a mocking light in her great eyes as she cried:

"You must practice starting, my dear fellow, or you'll get left in more senses than one to-morrow. Unless you lead at the start, you'll follow at the finish. With Laughing Leo on its back, that black demon will race from end to end!"

"I thought you were being run away with, darling!" exclaimed the rancher, with a long breath of relief.

"And, as usual, you come in one day too late for the fair!" with a malicious laugh, as a touch of the armed heel caused her steed to sidle off to a more respectful distance, from the arm that sought to clasp her round waist. "An omen! I'll hedge my bets! Make me an offer, Mr.

Brock, and if it's anything in reason—" "My hand and heart, dear Sate, if-" "I carry no small change, Mr. Brock," was the swift, sharp interposition. "I said in reason, while you ask entirely too long odds."

"What's that?" cried Finn McAvoy, riding up. "Betting, without giving the ould man a chance at the pie? What is it he's offerin' ye, little woman?"

"A mere trifle—not worth mentioning, dad," laughed Sate, turning away to hide an admirably simulated yawn with her gloved hand.

"She asked me to make her an offer, and I offered her my heart and hand, sir," stiffly muttered the white-faced lover, choking down his hot rage as best he could.

"A thrifle, she called it!" and Finn McAvoy leaned back in his saddle, roaring until the tears stood in his big eyes. "Sate Ann, ye'll be the death o' me yit, so ye will, now!"

"It'll be justifiable homicide, then, with your

Sate-ahems!" Sarah Anne turned upon the laughing giant with uplifted whip, only to drop her arm and shade her eyes with the member, leaning forward in the saddle as she gazed keenly over the plain at an object just then discovered.

A riderless horse had moved out from behind a small patch of brush and weeds, and was standing with head erect, looking at them with

a startled curiosity. "A horse—and a strange one, too!" exclaimed Brock, for the moment forgetting his grievance. "Look at the saddle-an English pad, as I'm a sinner! Some tenderfoot has come to

grief, sure as shooting!" Even as he uttered the words, Sate was fingering the neatly coiled lasso that hung at her sad-

dle-bow, and now she cried out: "Dollars to cents that I get first rope, Basil

Brock! The fair sex forever!"

Away she dashed, her keen spur pricking the flanks of her willing steed with hearty good will. And its cat-like quickness secured for its fair mistress several lengths the start before Basil Brock fully comprehended the meaning of her hasty speech.

With a vicious plunge of his spurs he dashed in pursuit, and in a score of bounds had almost regained his lost distance. A backward glance showed him Finn McAvoy leisurely trotting after them, already out of earshot. And with intense earnestness he uttered:

"A wager, but not in coin, fair Sate! Hand for hand, heart for heart! Dare you accept the

wager?" "I dare, but I don't choose," was the sharp response. "Don't be a bigger fool than nature intended, Basil Brock! Keep your love-making for those who can appreciate it—and her name is not Sarah Anne McAvoy!"

Another savage plunge of the spurs carried him to her side, and he leaned over in the saddle until their eyes met. Despite her nerve, remarkably great for one of her sex, Queen Sate shrunk away just a trifle as she saw that red, desperate glow in his eyes.

"Do you mean that, Sarah McAvoy? Have I no chance? Do you give me hate where I ask

for love? Once for all, Sate!" She read more in his glowing eyes than came from his tongue, and for once she was at a loss just what to reply. Only for a moment. A bright, arch glance shot through her drooping

lashes, and she murmured: "Love and murder, all in a breath! And with honest dad watching every move we make and word we utter! Be aisy, now, Basil, can't

ye?" Not much, to be sure, but Basil Brock was too desperately hungry for even the veriest crumb of comfort to be over-critical just then. That hard, desperate look softened, and he mut-

tered: "Then I may hope, darling?"

"It's not I that'll hinder ye, sure!" with a light laugh, as Queen Sate looked once more toward the stray horse, which had taken the alarm at their rapid advance and was now galloping away, though with a perceptible limp in one fore-foot. "If ye want more, ye must earn it! An hour's interview after supper, that 1 take the first rope!"

"Against what? Granted, whatever odds you ask!"

"I'll tell ye when I've won the stakes," with a

laugh. For the first time Basil Brock touched his lasso, his face pale and hard-set, his dark eyes

all aglow. And as Queen Sate glanced at him sideways, she knew that he was determined to win if possible.

Her own face paled a little, though in that alone she showed her uneasiness. There was more in this man than she had given him credit for. Until now he had been so easily managed, led on one moment, only to be driven away in mute despair the next, as she tired of the sport.

She saw that the end was near. The stray horse was too lame for anything like a long race against their picked mounts. They were overhauling him rapidly. Five minutes at the outside would decide. Should she lose, she knew that Basil Brock would hold her to her wager. And she knew that he would press his advantage to the utmost; that when that interview ended. she would be his promised wife, or he would be an enemy to be dreaded.

Her red lips compressed tightly as she kept close beside her cavalier, riding at his right hand. She saw him smile grimly, as though he divined her purpose, but he made no attempt to change his position, or to increase the distance between them. This was far too close for the management of a lasso on his part, yet he did not seem greatly disturbed.

Nearer and nearer the stray, until Queen Sate felt that they were within lasso-distance, and she swung the coil about her head, shooting a side-glance at her rival as she did so. To see him quickly shift his lasso to his left hand, using it with a freedom that recalled his ambidexterity.

"Now, Queen Sate!" he cried, with unconcealed triumph as the snake-like coils whirred about his head.

But he exulted too soon. Swift as thought the Amazon flung up her lasso, still tightly gripping the coils, striking his rope just as it was on the point of leaving his hand to shoot forward and close over the neck of the estray.

Her aim was true, and the lasso fell in a tangled knot just over the head of his own horse, catching in its feet and bringing both it and its rider to the ground, while Queen Sate shot ahead with a merry laugh, crying out clearly:

"All's fair in love or war, Mr. Brock! An

Irish girl never loses!" Even as the words passed her lips, the coil shot out and hovered for a moment over the head of the estray, then closed about its throat. Her trained steed stopped short, bracing itself for the expected shock. It came, but not heavily. The estray had apparently felt that choking noose before, and stopped as quickly as possible, trembling in every limb, but making no effort to break away.

Rapidly as this feat was performed, when Queen Sate turned to look back after her defeated lover, Basil Brock was on his feet and leaping into the saddle. His face streaked with dirt and blood, the last from a superficial gash on his forehead, the young man rode up and past her, saying not a word until he had secured the estray with his own halter, recoiled her lasso as he came back, fastening it in place at her saddle-bow.

"You won, Miss McAvoy," he said, coldly, never looking up to meet her steady, slightly anxious gaze.

"Through a trick—but I had to, Mr. Brock! It breaks my heart entirely to lose—even to the

dearest of friends!" He flushed a little at this ending; it came so soft, so sweet, after the slightest possible pause. But his voice was cold as before when he spoke again:

"And I am the man you dislike the most, of

course." "Did I say that, now?" with almost tender reproach, and—was it a tear that rendered her

great eyes so lustrous as he glanced up? "As well say it as think it," he muttered, his tones growing unsteady, his eyes drooping with a sense of shame, for he felt that he was again falling under that bewitching spell. "Miss Mc-Avov-"

"What's the matter with Sate?" came a soft whisper, and he felt a warm, perfumed breath fanning his ear.

He looked up, to meet her eyes, filled with a half-pitying, half-mocking light. And then, with a swiftness that defied evasion, his lips fairly touched hers in a hot, burning kiss.

Queen Sate drew swiftly back, but too late to foil him. Her eyes flashed, and her whip-hand uplifted, but he never flinched, never made a move to defend himself or to foil her vengeance. And then—she leaned back in her saddle, laughing heartily.

"That is trick for trick, and ye're no gentleman if ye say ye haven't the best of the exchange, Basil Brock!" she cried, reining her steed back a pace or two, but facing him with a bright smile.

"For another—given, not stolen—I'd exchange Heaven for hell!" he slowly uttered, his burning gaze fixing hers for a moment.

"Ye'll wait long for that same, Basil Brock, unless— Whist! the father is coming up! If he was to suspect what-"

"What brand, Brock?" cried out Finn Mc-Avoy, with a jolly heartiness that lainly proved he had not witnessed that little episode.

"A stray, from the looks," muttered Brock,

who had given the horse not a single thought after his failure.

Still, his supposition proved correct. There were no brands or marks familiar to their eyes, and this fact, with the flat saddle, so abominable in the estimation of all who have learned the art of riding in a prairie school, led them into looking around in quest of the owner.

"The reins are broken and were hanging free. He has had a fall, from the looks of his knees. What that means, to a greenhorn on a saddle like that, isn't hard to guess," tersely uttered Basil.

With a deftness that told this was not her first exploit of the sort, Queen Sate gathered her short skirts and stood erect on her saddle, glancing keenly around the horizon. She had scarcely swept a quarter of the compass before she uttered a low ejaculation.

"What is it, girl?" demanded Finn McAvoy, taking the direction from her eyes, rising high in his stirrups to better his view.

"A bunch of cattle—isn't that where the table-rock stands?" stretching out her whip-

"Sure it's the right direction, anyhow!" replied McAvoy, with a searching glance about them to perfect his memory. "Is it anything but stock, little woman?"

"They surround the rock—they are acting as though mad-I see something-it is our tenderfoot, I reckon!" dropping to the saddle and slipping her foot into the stirrup, shaking the reins and dashing away at full speed, closely followed by Basil Brock.

Finn McAvoy paused only long enough to knot the free end of the halter around one ankle of the lame horse, then dashed after the young couple, freeing his long stock-whip from its resting-place behind his saddle.

Side by side the young people dashed on, quickly gaining a clearer view of the table-rock, as the huge bowlder was called. This was some ten feet high, and nearly square in shape, its top as smooth and level as though the chisel of man had shaped it.

Nearly two hundred cattle now crowded around the rock, bellowing in low, deep, angry tones, pawing the ground, casting clods of dry dirt high into the air with their keen horns, evidently greatly excited or enraged about something. And as the riders came into clear view, that something stood erect upon the table-rock, gesticulating wildly with both arms; for that something was a man.

"Wild buffaloes! Beware their horns!" came floating across the space, causing Queen Sate to stare and Basil Brock to laugh.

"Buffalo! A tenderfoot, sure enough!" ex-

claimed the rancher. He lifted his head and shouted at the top of his voice, in tones so readily recognized by even the wildest of range cattle. The tumult ceased as by magic, and great eyes were turned upon them, half-angrily, half-frightened. And as the twain thundered direct at them, shouting and waving their arms, Basil Brock sending out a volley of pistol-like reports from his stockwhip, the cattle broke away in a wild stampede,

not waiting for closer acquaintance. The man on the table-rock stood staring in open-mouthed amazement at this precipitate flight, so simply brought about, and not until the silvery voice of Queen Sate called to him, did he turn with a start, one hand mechanically rising to his bare head as he recognized a lady.

"Marvelous-extraordinary-incredible-yet true!" he gasped, casting a glance over his shoulder toward the fleeing cattle. "Gone-put to flight—eh?"

"Because we were mounted, sir," laughed Queen Sate, curiously eying the stranger. "Had we been afoot, only some such refuge as this could have saved us from being trampled to pomace."

"Then they aren't-I thought they were buffalo!"

"Minus the humps," laughed Basil Brock. The stranger nodded vigorously, clapping a hand to his thigh with a sharp report as he ejaculated:

"That's it! I thought there was something lacking-they didn't look quite familiar-though they acted too awfully so!" with a rueful laugh and a side-glance at the bright face of Queen Sate. "Invited me to take a horn, without stopping for an introduction! Eh?"

Queen Sate laughed at this moldy chestnut, but Basil Brock only frowned. He was of too jealous a disposition to relish the idea of a fresh acquisition to their little circle. And greenhorn though he seemed, the stranger was far from being a bad-looking fellow.

Of medium hight, but of athletic build. Clad in rather flashy garb of latest cut; Prince Albert coat, vest, trowsers, fine boots; standing collar and neat tie; an imitation diamond in his stiff shirt-front, and huge cameos in his cuffs; a bright, large-linked chain crossed his vest. Hat he had none, having doubtless lost it during his scramble up the almost perpendicular side of the table-rock.

"There's my horse now—the ugly brute!" he exclaimed, catching sight of Finn McAvoy, who had returned after the animal as soon as he saw

his swifter companions had put the stock to flight. "I'm ever so much obliged to you for saving my life," he added, leaping lightly to the ground, giving a little twist of his face as he did so. "Confound that horse! They war anted him sure-footed, and the first thing-ow!"

"You are injured, I fear?" softly uttered Queen Sate, bending over in the saddle as the stranger suddenly "favored" one foot.

"Only a wrench-not worth mentioning, ma'am." with a faint smile that apparently covered no little pain.

Basil Brock leaped to the ground and knelt to examine the injured ankle. Not wholly prompted by kindness, it must be said, but more to forestall the sympathy of the woman he loved. "No bones broken, that I can see," he mut-

tered, presently. "Then we'll make no more bones about it," smiled the stranger, who seemed rather partial

to feeble jests. Finn McAvoy just then rode up, and the stranger at once took possession of his horse, climbing into the saddle after anything but a graceful manner, not a little to the contempt of the young rancher, who waited until the other's eyes were upon him, then vaulted into his saddle without touching stirrup, frowning a little

as the stranger turned away without a remark

on his adroitness, to answer Finn McAvoy. No need to repeat his explanation in extenso since it was long-drawn-out by the glib-tongued stranger. A stumble of his horse, caused by breaking through some sort of burrow, flung him from the saddle, and he failed to catch the animal, chasing him for a long time and over several miles. Then, losing sight of his horse, he wandered on until sighted by the herd of cattle. They, unused to the sight of a man on foot, soon closed in on him, and only the table-rock saved him from a frightfui death beneath their hoofs.

"I foolishly took them for a sort of buffalo, though I did miss their humps, as I've seen them pictured in looks," with a frank laugh at his own greenness. "I'm awfully grateful to you all, and if you ever come to town, I'll try to get even. And that reminds me," with an abrupt transition. "Can you tell me where I might find a gentleman named Melchoir Parkindale?"

Was it only fancy, or did father and daughter interchange a look of startled uneasiness?

CHAPTER III.

NOT EXACTLY A BED OF ROSES.

LAUGHING LEO stood motionless watching the rapidly receding figure of Meta-lupa as long as it remained within his range of vision; but that was not long. Veering to the right, the Indian beauty sw pt around the point of rocks, vanishing from view. The young rancher drew a long breath that was almost a sigh: so nearly one that it startled even himself, and his cheeks flushed hotly as he cast a swift glance about him.

What was it that brought the bright, saucy face of Queen Sate up before him so distinctly, just then?

In that wandering gaze, his eyes fell upon the carcass of his good horse Mott, and a hard, dangerous light came into them. With a toss of his head, like one who seeks to cast aside all disagreeable thoughts, Leo Laughlin sprung into life and action.

"Poison, beyond a doubt!" he muttered, stooping over Mott and gazing keenly into the glazed eyes. "Not strychnine, for, freely as the poor fellow drank, he couldn't have swallowed three or four ounces of the infernal stuff. and less than that won't knock a horse over so suddenly."*

Laughing Lee turned to the trough, closely examining its contents, but without making any ediscovery. He hardly expected to do so, after the words of Meta-lupa. And yet, how account for the sudden death of poor old Mott?

The water was running freely, overflowing through the notch cut in the lower end of the long trough, thus preventing an overflow at either side, keeping the ground about the trough dry and firm. The water falling from the little spout kept the contents of the trough pretty well stirred up, thus insuring a complete change every few minutes.

Laughing Lee turned away from the trough

with a frown.

"Not in here, as I might have known. And

she said so." As he muttered these words, Laughing Leo cast a glance out in the direction where Metalupa had disappeared from sight. After all, it was natural enough that his thoughts should revert to the Indian girl at brief intervals. She had undoubtedly saved his life. Only for her coming, he would have drank heartily of the cool waters, and by now be lying a corpse, the helpless victim of a vengeance as horrible as it was mysterious.

"If I could have drawn the truth from her lips!" he muttered, his gloved hands clinching tightly, his teeth clicking and his eyes flashing

*A fact. While two or three grains of strychnine will kill a dog, it requires fully as many ounces of the drug to affect a horse after a like fashion.

with a dangerous fire. "Only a bint—only the ghost of a clew! I'd never know rest until I ran the fiend to earth, and then-"

He left the hiatus unfilled by words, but there was no need for more open speech. Punishment would swiftly follow discovery, and that punishment would be death at the hands of the man who had so narrowly escaped falling a sacrifice to this diabolical plot.

Satisfied that the poison could not have been placed in the horse-trough itself, Laughing Leo looked around further. Footprints of both man and beast were plenty enough, but nothing could be learned from an examination of these. Where so many had stopped at the spring, who could pick out a certain set and say that these were the marks left behind by the foul assassin?

He knelt on the smooth, flat stone beside the chiseled basin in the rock, removing the heavy slab that covered the little well of water. It was pure and limpid, giving no signs to the outward eye of the deadly drug with which it was so strongly impregnated. There was no sediment at the bottom, save a few particles of stone that had fallen into the basin as Laughing Leo uncovered it.

Frowning darker than ever, Laughing Leo replaced the covering. He could no longer doubt. It had seemed incredible that any one could be fiendish enough to poison a fount at which any one of a hundred men might drink at any hour of the day.

"There is poison, plain enough," with a side glauce at the carcass of poor Mott. "It is in the water, too. Mott was well enough before he drank so freely-poor fellow! If I had carried my cruel lesson a little further! If -bah!" with a short, hard laugh. "I did not, and he suffered. How much, let the demon who set the ball to rolling tell when I've got him by the throat."

Hardly "Laughing Leo" just then. Pale as a corpse, with set jaws, and a white, pinched look about his flexible nostrils; with eyes that glowed with a reddish light, and pupils that contracted until they were almost invisible. Had the dastardly poisoner seen his intended victim just then, he might well have trembled for the result.

"If only for stock, I wouldn't think so much about it," he muttered, his brows wrinkling. "That would simply be of a piece with all the rest; but it's worse than that! The stuff is not between this and the trough, and that proves her words true—the demon intended murder!"

There could be no other interpretation placed on the affair. If the drug was meant only for stock, it would have been placed below the basin at which all men were accustomed to drink. If simply dropped into the trough the poisoned water would long since have run away. If in the spout leading from basin to trough, something to indicate this must have been discovered by his close scrutiny.

With these thoughts flitting through his brain, Leo Laughlin turned his attention above the basin, where the ground was moist and wet with the spring waters; and scarcely had he done so before a sharp ejaculation broke from his lips, and he sprung forward, believing that at last be had solved the mystery.

The impress of a human hand, imperfect but unmistakable, in the soft earth above. And the print of a bended knee only a slight distance below the hand-mark.

Not much, but quite enough to give Laughing

Leo the clew he sought.

"Made this very day!" he muttered, bending over the tell-tale sign. "A man knelt there. What for? Not to drink, with the basin so convenient just below. What made him try to rub out the print his left hand made when it slipped from this bit of rock?"

Even as the words hissed through his clinched teeth, Leo Laughlin was looking about for the answer. And in another moment he believed that answer was found.

With his knife he set to work, scraping away the mud and picking out the bits of stone covering a point where, as he now recalled, the main vein of the spring had once been laid bare. It was covered up now, and he believed he knew why and when.

"It was uncovered only two days ago. It may have been filled up by accident, but I don't believe it. I believe—I know it now!"

His knife was grating over a flat stone, and his fingers quickly scooped away the moist dirt, laying bare a flat flake of rock more than a foot square. And as he lifted this, a savage cry escaped his lips.

Beneath, lying across the vein of water, yet in such a manner as to permit the fluid to pass on, was a mud-stained bag, tightly tied up.

Laughing Leo knew that the first part of his search was ended now, and he lifted the bag from the water, finding it soft, but very heavy for its size. A touch of his knife cut the string, and the bag was opened, revealing a pasty, whitish mass, but which had a curious, mineral-like feeling between his thumb and forefinger as he lightly tested it.

The first glance assured him that it was not strychnine, for he had more than once made use of that powerful drug in poisoning wolves. What it was, he could not be positive from this

hasty inspection, but he fancied that it must be arsenic. The unusual weight helped him to this conclusion.

Carefully laying the sack aside, he pursued his investigation, and in a few moments more was rewarded by another discovery. A few inches lower down, yet in the same vein of water, he found a second package, much smaller than the first, and looking like a compound of powdered herbs of some description. Then, when the vein had been followed down to where it entered the stone basin without any further discoveries. Laughing Leo took the two packages and regained the level by the horse-trough.

Carrying water to one side he carefully washed the muddy sacks, scanning them inch by inch in hopes of gaining a clew, however faint, to the dastardly author of this outrage, but in vain. The larger sack was simply one which had contained buckshot, from a Chicago shot-tower, and bore no further distinguishing marks. The smaller receptacle was of coarse woolen, rudely stitched with cord; part of an old army-blanket to all appearance.

"There's only one thing clear enough to swear by: no friend put them there! But which one of my enemies? A wide range for selection, the foul fiend knows.

He retied the packages, laying them carefully on one side as he hunted up a couple of sticks, the ends of which he cleft with his knife, planting one beside the stone basin, which he filled with mud and tightly packed it down, then stuck the other stick upright beside the carcass of his poisoned horse. He tore some leaves from a note-book, printing the word "poison" on each in large, bold characters, placing the warning notice in each of the cleft sticks.

While thus occupied, his brain was very busy, and something of his reflections must be given in this connection, for the better understanding of what is to follow.

His had been a strange, eventful life, almost from his birth.

His mother was an Italian, and when a child she made a precarious living posing as a model. When yet a child in years, she was taken away by an old man, a wealthy, titled German, who married her. A child was born to them, and named Leopold-Laughing Leo, as we know him.

After a few years there was a tragedy. Herman Burvenich was discovered dead in his bed, a dagger driven through his heart. His wife and child were gone, no one could say whither.

The widow—under another name and character, however-came to America. As Leopold grew older, she separated from him. Already he was looking too old to be the son of his mother—one of those occasional beings who show no trace of passing years after reaching woman-

She married a wealthy old fur-trader named Morris Kirkendall, but his wedded bliss did not last long. His eyes were rudely opened, and the beautiful adventuress fled "with a handsomer man." There was a long and bitter pursuit—an overtaking and a tragedy—but with this our story has nothing to do. Enough that. though Morris Kirkendall firmly believed that the woman who had covered his honors ble name with shame and sorrow was dead, she still lived to cross his path when he least expected it.*

It was not difficult for so cunning a woman to make a son, who had been kept in ignorance of her worst traits, believe her much more wronged than sinful, and right willingly Leopold joined with her in an attempt for revenge on Morris Kirkendall, who had blazoned her shame to the wide world.

This was many years after Morris Kirkendall completed his vengeance, as he believed. He had first secured a divorce. And then, when the bitter wound was healed, he married again. His second wife lived barely long enough to teach her baby girl how to talk, then she died.

During these years Leopold Burvenich was left to make his own way in the world, and with such wild, fiery blood in his veins, it is little marvel that he should have grown reckless, even sinful; the wonder is that he proved no worse.

Naturally, there was little love between mother and son, living apart as they had from his childhood. Leopold acknowledged her claims, when she preferred them, but that was about all. He joined in her vengeful plans, more through a love for excitement and adventure, than from a sense of duty or of love.

The "She Wolf," as Morris Kirkendall called Lena Burvenich, had not entirely lost sight of the man whom she had wronged so bitterly. She knew that he had married again, and that he had a daughter, young and lovely, pure and innocent. At that daughter she resolved to aim her first blow.

She sent her son, who changed his name to Leo Laughlin, to secure a footing in the household of the fur-trader, and bidding him, if possible, teach the girl to love him. Leo was nothing loth, and fortune seemed to favor him from the very start. He secured a clerkship in Morris Kirkendall's store, and before many moons had improved on the plans of his mother by falling in love with Luada Kirkendall.

^{*} Note. - See Beadle's Lime Libra y, No. 839.

That love was not returned, for Luada loved a young man named Jesse Purchass, also in the

employ of her father.

Morris Kirkendall rather favored Leo, having taken a strong dislike to Purchass, whose face reminded him of the "She Wolf." And when Purchass pressed his suit, the choleric old fellow broke out into a storm of angry ridicule, calling him a weakling, the shadow of a man, reminding him that Luada came from pure western stock, and that only a man, with all that word implies, could ever hope to mate with her.

Kirkendall, to put an end to a disagreeable scene, and to forever banish this presumptuous lover, bade him begone; bade him go out on the Buffalo Range and search for a noted hidehunter known as Spread Eagle Sam; bade him prove his manhood by spending a winter there, his skill by making a record to equal that of the

King of the Buffalo Range. "Then come back, an' I'll talk to you, sonny!"

he chuckled.

It was a hard task, but Jesse Purchass proved himself equal to it. He spent six months learning the use of firearms, in tempering his muscles, then sought out Spread Eagle Sam, frankly telling him his story.

Much more boldly than Jesse Purchass, Laughing Leo told his love, and Morris Kirkendall, having not the ghost of an idea that the test would ever be accepted, made much the same answer that he had given the other presumptuous fellow who tried to rob him of his

"Beauty-bird." The test was accepted, and that same fall the trial came off. Leo was in a fair way of winning, when Luada begged Jesse to interfere. He obeyed, though he knew he was bringing disgrace upon his own head by thus violating the laws of the contest. Leo failed, but there were exciting scenes in camp when the She Wolf struck her blow.

She stole away Luada, but Spread Eagle Sam rescued her, the She Wolf, when defeat stared her in the face, taking her own life rather than be captured. She died, exulting in the fact that Luada was in the power of her son, who would bitterly avenge the death of his mother.

Instead, Laughing Leo, now fully realizing the utter hopelessness of gaining the heart of the maiden whom he had learned to love so ardently, carried her to her father, then taking his departure, just as Spread Eagle Sam camo hot upon his trail. From Sam's lips he learned of his mother's suicide, and then rode away, to be seen no more by the Kirkendalls.

Associated with the She Wolf, and madly in love with her, was a man who gave the name of Major John Westgate. He admitted that he had been dismissed from the regular army in disgrace; that he had a wife then living. His passion was so intense, that he offered to remove his wife, if the She Wolf would flee with him to a land where their past would be unknown.

The She Wolf toyed with him, now soothing, now driving him wild with her mockery. And then, when she had Luada Kirkendall helplessly in her power, and, inflamed with drink, proposed to torture the girl, Westgate interposed. In her fury she stabbed him to the

heart.

After the tragedy, his brightest hopes ruined, Leo Laughlin wandered out into the stock ranges of Montana and Wyoming. Here he fell in with Spread Eagle Sam, whose heart he had won by first thrashing the herculean hidehunter, then beating him with his own pet wea-

pons. Sam's occupation was gone. The last buffalo had given up the ghost; if not the very last, so near it that there was no longer money in hidehunting. Spread Eagle could not live in the cities. He wanted room to spread himself; to clap his wings and send forth his eagle-scream without fear of disturbing querulous neighbors. And in these vast ranges he saw his chance for a new, but not less suitable life.

He and Laughing Leo at once fraternized. They each had a snug sum of money, and Morris Kirkendall would supply them with as much more as they could wish. There was "big money" in stock-raising. And so, within a month, a range was secured, stock bought, with the necessary buildings, and the firm of "Laughlin & Ingalls" was added to the Stock Growers' Association.

Anticipation was very well, but realization proved very different. At first the new firm prosp red, and were making money, "hand over fist," but then came strange and unex-

pected complications.

Their neighbors anybody within a county or two is regarded as a neighbor on the rangegrew cold and disagreeable, avoiding their company as much as possible. Accident after accident happened to their stock. There were an unusual number of wild stampedes for which their herders could not account satisfactorily. Their choicest stock were stolen, and others found dead; how killed or by whom, could only be surmised. The crimes were so adroitly committed that not even the shadow of a clew was left behind.

One of the most open in his enmity was Basil Brock, one of the wealthiest ranchers in that

district. More than once he had given cause for a fracas, had Laughing Leo not marked out for himself a new and purer course from that which he had followed in early life. More than once had Spread Eagle Sam begged his partner to read the conceited young fellow a lesson.

"You kin do it, an' not hafe try, pardner! Jes' set them little steam-hammers o' yourn to work 'bout his fizzymahog, an' his own mother wouldn't 'knowledge her kid in ten seconds! Do it—he wants it! He wants it monstrous bad, pardner!"

But Laughing Leo shook his head, smiling

faintly as he replied:

"That would be only the beginning, Sam. Shots would follow blows, and I've sworn off. I want to live a quiet life, if I can. There's sins enough in the past to account for-worse luck!" "But you won't let him rub it in?" indig-

nantly. "Not if I can keep out of his way," with a soft

laugh.

Laughlin was at no loss to account for this strong antipathy on the part of Basil Brock. He knew that the young rancher was madly in love with the "Belle of the Range," Queen Sate. And he knew, too, that the fair Sarah Anne was rather inclined to smile upon himself, instead of returning that adoration,

He was thinking now of all this; recalling how persistent Basil Brock had been during that just finished round-up, in "crowding" him. He had finally succeeded in bantering Leo into a race, between their own pick of horses, for a stake of five hundred head of three-year-old steers-no mean stake for even the richest of ranchers.

"I don't want to lay it at his door, but who else could do it?" muttered Laughing Leo, moodily gazing at the swelling carcass of his once good steed. "Who else hates me bad enough to lead them to such a dastardly crime? No one!"

He was forced to come to this conclusion, yet it failed to satisfy him. Rude, insolent, disagreeable as Basil Brock had shown bimself from the very first, he did not appear capable of such a dastardly deed. He was more apt to strike

with knife or speed a hot bullet.

Only for the spot in which the poison had been placed, Laughing Leo could more readily have believed what reason told him must be true. Five hundred head of market steers was a heavy stake for even a rich rancher like Basil Brock to lose; as lose he surely would, unless something happened to cripple or kill the favorite black racer of the Laughlin & Ingalls Ranch. Had the drugs been placed so as to poison only the be so hard. Hatred and covetousness-for the race was positively "play or pay"-might drive Basil Brock that far. But to murder? To poisoning the spring from which any one of the ranchers might drink?

"I won't believe it until I have to!" muttered Laughlin, shaking himself as though in the effort to cast off such horrible doubts. "He may be innocent. I'll accuse no man, even in my mind, without more positive proof. If she would only speak out! If she only would! She must! She cannot refuse, when I place the case fairly before her! She must see that while this cowardly wretch is at liberty, the lives of honest men are at his mercy. She must "

Leo gave a sudden start, his eyes opening

widely.

"Who can she be shielding? Surely not her father—not Old John? Bah!" with a short laugh at the ridiculous idea. "I never even met the old fellow! He can have no cause to poison me, and I'm crazy to even dream of such a ridiculous idea! Why, one might as well-"

Again he stopped short in his musings, this time springing to his feet, hand on weapons. For sharp and rapid came the crack-crackcracking of pistol-shots.

THE LOCOED RACER. his poisoned horse, against which he had leaned his Winchester, one hand extended to grasp that weapon, while the other drew a revolver from his belt. All this before even his quick eyes could distinguish the figure of a single horseman riding rapidly toward him; all this the purely mechanical celerity which he had learned during his adventurous life. For even as his gaze fell upon the horseman he recognized him for a friend, not an enemy.

"Spread Eagle-and in such a hnrry," dropped from his lips as he straightened up without touching the repeating-rifle, using that hand to make a quick signal above his head. "There's more trouble, or I'm an angel with wings full

grown,"

One thing was self-evident—the ex-hide-hunter was greatly excited about something. He was riding at the top speed of a good horse, and though he was no longer discharging the shots that had attracted the attention of his partner, he was swinging his great hat above his head and sending a long-drawn yell before him. And it was this yell, so different from the exultant eagle-scream for which Spread Eagle Sam was famous throughout the Buffalo Ranges that told Laughing Leo it was no glad tidings his partner brought.

"More deviltry, of course!" with a hard, sterm frown, as he cast a glance at the carcass of his good steed. "Not blacker than I have to give in return, though."

The glow in his eyes deepened as he saw Spread. Eagle Sam rising in his stirrups as he came nearer, craning his head forward, evidently puzzled to understand what he saw. He leaned against the watering-trough, his arms folded. closely over his swelling chest, his jaws firmly

Spread Eagle Sam dashed up to the spot, casting only a single glance into the white, bard-set face of his partner as he leaped from the saddle. Laughing Leo caught the horse by the head, holding him away from the trough.

Spread Eagle Sam strode over to where poor Mott had fallen, his keen eyes first noting the blood which had flowed from the deft deathwound in the spine. Stooping, he scanned this, and the cleanness of the cut, the precision of its: delivery, told him much more than it would have told ordinary men.

His lips closed tightly, his nostrils began to quiver as his big eyes roved rapidly over the swelling carcass, lingering longest at the head,. where the open jaws revealed the froth-covered tongue. He stooped lower, opening the jaws and glancing keenly at the roof of the mouth, then rising erect and turning toward Laughing Leo, ejaculating:

"P'izen! Pard?"

That title contained a world of questioning, and Laughlin so understood it.. He nodded his head shortly, then led the horse which Sam Ingalls had ridden thither to one side, knotting the trail-rope around a rock spur.

"He won't stray, pard," called out Sam, perplexed by this unusual caution. "He wants a mouthful o' cold water, I reckon, an'-"

"So did Mott, and you see what come of it!" Spread Eagle uttered a sharp ejaculation, his brows gathering dark as a thunder-cloud. "You don't mean-"

"The spring has been poisoned. Why do you marvel?" with a hard, disagreeable laugh as her retraced his steps. "Is it so strange? Isn't it what those nameless hell-bounds have been leading up to for a year past? I only wonder it has been delayed so long!"

"P'izened the trough! P'izened-to murder dumb critters fer ugly spite! P'izened-I cain't make it come reasonable, nohow! Pard?"

Spread Eagle Sam brushed a broad hand across his eyes as he stared stupidly into the white face of his Dandy Pard. Thousands of water intended for stock, the solution would not dumb brutes had fallen by his hands, but only in the way of business. He had even used poison to thin out the annoying gangs of wolves: and coyotes that infested his range while hidehunting. But to poison a horse! To poison a watering-place free to the whole community. and one as much frequented as this! It was absolutely incredible.

A strangely cold smile crept into the handsome face of Leo Laughlin as he grasped his: partner by the arm and led him to where the two sacks of poison still lay. The smile deepened as Spread Eagle Sam took them in his hands and silently examined their contents. And that smile became an audible laugh as he led the stupefied giant up the slope and showed him from whence the poison had been taken.

Strong though his perves were, Sam Ingalls: shivered as that laugh grated on his ears. And only for the deep coating of tan on his massive features, his face would have shown to the full as white as that of his Dandy Pard.

"You don't mean that, Ind?" he muttered

hoarsely.

"There's the print of the shot-sack remaining. You can see how all the water had to run over. under, around, or through that mass of poison. And how thoroughly the devil's work was done. the carcass of old Mott, yonder, can testify."

Cold and steady came the sentences. Laughing Leo showed no signs of excitement in voice LAUGHING LEO sprung to the side of or manner. A stranger would have deemed him wholly uninterested in the matter; but Spread Eagle Sam understood his mate better than that. That white, silent rage was ten times more deadly than the wildest bluster-

> He could tell something of what Leo felt by the lava-flood that boiled over in his own veins. His great eyes, protruding still further from their sockets than usual, shot a glance toward the horse-trough, then back to the tell-tale imprints in the moist earth at their feet.

> "That was bad enough, but this-words cain't begin to tetch it!" he grated savagely, his huge hands closing and unclosing, working as though they felt the throat of the foul poisoner already in their grip. "It's bloody death when we ketch the hellion! An' we will ketch him! We've got to! You know the dirty critter, pard?"

Laughing Leo shook his head.

"But you kin make a pritty close guess?" per-

sisted Sam.

"It's a mighty wide field to choose from, old man," with a faint smile, as they passed down to the level again. "Run it over in your own mind, and see for yourself. A mighty wide field-bounded only by the horizon-embracing the whole neighborhood!"

The head of the ex-hide-hunter drooped at this

speech, for he felt its perfect truth.

Despite the profession which he had followedone, too, that in a great measure isolated him from the society of his fellow-men-Sam Ingalls was a lover of his race. Rude, rough, boisterous, ever ready for a fisticuff or a pitched battle with still more deadly weapons when nothing more harmless would serve, the herculean hidehunter was still better content when at peace with the whole world. He wanted to make others as happy and care-free as he would be himself. And as the years grew over his head, this old yearning for more and better society had kept him from following the scattering herds of buffalo still further from civilization. This yearning had made him all the more eager to join in with Leo Laughlin when this new departure was proposed.

The result had been a very bitter disappointment for him, after all the bright day-dreams of those earlier weeks, when his dearest wishes seemed on the point of being fully realized. It was through no fault of his that the breach between the new firm and those surrounding them had steadily grown and widened. He had met frowns with smiles, dark looks and sour words with laughing good-humor. He had smothered his naturally hot temper many and many a time, through his reluctance to abandon those

bright hopes.

But there is a limit to everything, and the time soon came when it was Laughing Leo who had to hold Spread Eagle Sam in check when none other than the Dandy Pard, whom he had learned to love and respect, could have

averted bloodshed.

For an instant something of this hot anger flashed up in his eyes, as they encountered the coldly blazing orbs of his Dandy Pard. Only for a single breath, however. Sam was wiser than he had been in earlier years, and though he never yet had turned his back on an enemy no matter what the weight of odds against him, just now he felt the utter hopelessness of fighting the entire neighborhood.

"Leo, le's drap the hull durned thing!" he muttered, his tones strangely unsteady. "Le's pull out o' this durned kentry-le's go now, afore we turn into hogs like the rest o' the

gang!"

Leo smiled faintly, though he knew how hard it must have been for Sam Ingalls to force his lips into pronouncing such words as these.

"You forget the race for to-morrow, pardner. To run from that match would be even bitterer medicine than a dose of the infernal stuff that

laid out poor old Mott!"

Spread Eagle turned sharply away, his hands clinching until the bones and sinews audibly snapped. And something in his manner sent a cold shiver through the veins of his Dandy Pard.

Laughlin strode after, grasping the huge fellow by the arm and whirling him round until they stood face to face, with a power that seemed incredible when their contrasting bulk was borne in mind.

"Out with it, Sam Ingalls!" Laughlin remarked sharply, as their eyes fairly met. "What

news do you bring?"

"Blacker then I found waitin' me here," with a side glance toward the bloated carcass of the poisoned horse.

"Out with it, then!" with increasing sternness. "Am I a weak babe that you hum and

haw over a bit of fresh ill-luck?"

"They won't be no race to-morrow, pard," slowly uttered the other, with a convulsive gulping in his throat that rendered the words difficult to distinguish with certainty.

Laughing Leo shivered anew. His steel-like grip fell from the arm of his giant partner, and his blazing eyes sunk to the ground. For the moment he seemed totally unmanned; but this passed off as rapidly as it came on. A shake of his athletic figure; a proud, defiant toss of his head; and then his voice was even and steady as he said:

"The've played both ends against the middle, eh? One chance was not enough? They've

poisoned Tornado?"

"Wuss then that-they've locoed him!" Laughing Leo had nerved himself to hear that his idolized black racer was dead, poisoned as poor Mott had been slain; and had the expected words fallen from the lips of the giant, he felt that he could have listened without giving sign of the fierce grief that was tugging at his heartstrings. But this was wors -- and he staggered back, saved from falling only by the horse-trough against which he now leaned for support.

Stread Eagle Sam hissed forth an imprecation that almost scorched his lips. His pop-eyes were like halls of living fire. The veins stood out on his temples until it seemed as though they must burst from the hot blood that surged through

them so madly.

"Locoed! They wouldn't kill him outright! That wasn't enough to satisfy them! That would be enough to putt an eend to the race, an' not a word or a hint could be flung in your face! But it wouldn't do-they must crow an' flop thar wings over us both! Fer what'll they say? That we was skeered out, an' so drugged Tornado

ruther than go on with the match! Say-let 'em! An' let 'em swaller the answer I'll cram down tha'r dirty gullets-ef they kin!"

His rage fairly choked him, and forgetful of what had passed between them, Sam bent his head to take a draught from the horse-trough. Laughlin caught him and hurled him back, a strange smile on his face, his voice ominously. soft and even as he uttered:

"That's the shortest way out, I know, but I can't spare you yet, old pard! I'll need your good backing before the end, and-"

A sickly grin distorted the giant's face as he

interposed:

"A durned ole fool, ain't I? But I didn't think what I was doin'. I wanted to squinch the red-hot fire that's burnin' in my throat, but I reckon I'd ruther shet my trap an's mother it fer lack o' wind then to taste that devil's brothugh!" and he cast a shivering glance toward the bloated carcass of the dead buckskin.

Leo laughed hardly.

"Don't take the trouble to thank me, old fellow. It will come to about the same thing in the end, I reckon. We're fair men, but we'll hardly hold out until the whole neighborhood's used up. And that's about the size of the job that's before us, pard."

"We'll eat our bigness, anyway; an' when the circus is over, them that's left in workin' trim'll be better able to 'scribe our faces then our backs," grimly uttered the big rancher, his strong teeth clicking audibly, his pop-eyes glow-

Laughing Leo made no response, but strode over to where his poisoned horse lay, unfastening the tightly-drawn "cinch" preparatory to removing the silver-adorned saddle. In silence Spread Eagle Sam bore a hand, his mighty strength sufficing to lift the animal from the ground far enough for the equipage to be removed without cutting.

Laughlin wrapped the packages of poison up in the saddle-blanket for safer carriage, motioning his big pard to mount, handing him the

horse furniture and the poison.

Sam hesitated, muttering: "Better you ride, pard. You kin git thar heap sooner, an' mebbe you kin do more fer

Tornado then—"

"A few minutes either way can make little difference," was the crisp response. "You're not a man to scare at a shadow. You know how the infernal weed works. If Tornado is locoed, the harm's all done."

"He's got it, sure-got it bad, too!" grated Ingalls, a savage snort making his thin nostrils

"Tell me what you know-I can listen while we travel."

Calmly, evenly came the words, but Sam knew how heavily this fresh blow from an unknown source had fallen upon his Dandy Pard.

Only one whose life has been passed for the greater part in the saddle can even begin to appreciate the intense love which one comes to feel for a good horse. To such a man, provided he is a man, not simply a brute with half the usual complement of legs, his horse becomes like a wife and children, so far as love and affection are concerned.

And Laughing Leo loved his black steed with all his naturally passionate nature. Only once had that love been cast in the shade by a stronger passion; and when that passion was frustrated. Tornado became still more precious in the eyes

of his master, if possible. It was this noble steed he had counted on carrying him to victory on the morrow; the only horse on the ranch which he knew stood any chance of defeating the pet racer of Basil

Brock's.

Knowing as he did that to win over the pet equine of that vast range would but increase the general dislike toward himself and partner, Laughing Leo had adroitly turned aside more stake proposed; he knew that Tornado, with anything like fair play, could "run all around" the light-limbed bay at the distance set by Basil Brock in his challenge. But he had turned down the too-dark pages of the past, and hoped to live a new and more regular life for the future. He was weary to death of the lawless course he had followed from early boyhood, and he hoped to keep clear of all that could possibly drive him backward.

For this reason had he borne with open slights, even with insults such as, in the past days, cauld only have been wiped out with hot lead or cold steel. It was a sort of penance imposed by himself, during the dark and bitter days that fellowed the tragic death of his mother, when his heart was softened by the pure and hopeless love which had, almost despite himself, entered into his life for a brief space.

But there is a limit to human endurance, and that limit Basil Brock had driven him across.

"I'd ruther bite my tongue off then to say it, but ef it's got to come-out with it!" grated Spread Eagle Sam as be put his horse to a brisk canter in order to avoid being left behind by the nimble-footed rancher, who ran smooth and level as though trained to the cinder path.

"Satan roast the hellion that putt the cussed

weed in the pore critter's manger!"

"You found it there? You know he has been locoed, by something more than his symptoms, then?" asked Leo, turning his head but never breaking his stride to speak or to listen. It was a hard story to tell, as Spread Eagle

said, and it came from his lips in broken sentences, as though he had to use actual force in ejecting them. The facts can be put in much less space than would be required for a literal report.

He had parted from Laughing Leo at the place where the Mavericks were disposed of, after the round-up proper had come to an end. An errand to a neighbor had called him away before his partner was ready.

This errand performed, he hastened at once to their ranch, to be met by the house-servants -the cook and his boyish aid-whose excited cries and gestures warned him of past or coming trouble. How serious that was, he did not even suspect until he received the evidence of his own eyes, though they told him that Tornado was acting like a creature suddenly gone mad.

"Thank it was jes' his playful ways, ye see," the giant said, his tones husky and uncertain. "Never thunk sech a devil's deed was possible

in a Christian land!"

The moment he caught sight of the black racer in its roomy stall, the terrible truth burst upon him. This was no fit of fractiousness, born of confinement and restraint. The animal was raving mad. And with an insanity such as he had never seen save where the sufferer had eaten

freely of the "loco weed."

"He never knowed me, pard," and as he spoke Spread Eagle Sam had to try repeatedly before he could swallow the lump that rose in his honest throat. "He come at me like a fury, the froth flying from his teeth, his eyes popping from his head and looking blood-red as though crammed full o' fire! Like a flash it come onto me, then, an' fer a good bit they was too much wet in my ole eyes fer me to see jest what the pore critter was doin'. An' then—you know how it acts, pard. He fell in a heap, an' I knowed the time was come fer me to act!

"I went in his stall, an' thar, in the manger, I found what was left o' the cussed stuff! I didn't hev to look twicet afore I knowed it-

wuss luck!"

All this while Laughing Leo had been running along like some admirably disguised engine, and now, he stopped short as the ranch was sighted. Not for that, but to their ears on the favoring breeze of evening there came shrill, frenzied screams, mingling with dull thumping as though of iron-shod hoofs against heavy plank.

"He's still alive!" and Laughing Leo sprung ahead at a rate of speed that tested the limbs of

the good horse to keep pace with him.

"Don't be too brash, pard!" cried Spread Eagle, spurring his panting borse in the effort to pass before the white-faced rancher. "He's too mad fer to know ye—it'll be sart'in death ef you ventur' inside! Don't be too brash-fer my sake, ef not your own!"

That was perhaps the only appeal to which Laughing Leo would have listened in that critical moment. "For his sake!" The sake of the one being in all the wide world on whose love and fidelity he could safely rely! For his sake, he slackened his mad pace.

"It's done, an' nothin' we kin do'll alter it fer the better, lad," said Spread Eagle Sam, his voice husky and full of strong emotion as he sprung from the saddle and passed one arm about the waist of his partner-much as a lover might seek to soothe his grieving sweetheart.

The action was so unlike the rough, careless hide-hunter, that it strangely affected his partner. He knew that Spread Eagle Sam had respected him ever since that memorable day on the Buffalo Range, when the kid-gloved dandy than one pointed challenge, only to yield at | had read the hide-hunters such a stinging lesson last, when he was driven into a corner. Not in politeness. He knew that since their enterthat he doubted his powers of winning the great | ing into partnership, that respect had deepened into genuine affection; but this action showed a degree of love such as he had never dreamed the big man was capable of feeling for another

Leo slackened his pace to a walk, but his face was averted. There were tears in his blue eyes, and, man-like, he was ashamed to have then

seen, even by this true friend.

"You know how the cussed weed werks, pard," huskily continued the big rancher, hardly knowing what words he uttered, only thinking to calm and steady his partner. "You know it drives the quietest hoss plum crazy mad. He won't know ye, nur recognize your voice. He'd dash at ye wuss then a tiger the minnit you show yourself. B'ar this in mind, an' stiddy down afore ye try to look in at the pore critter."

Not until they reached the fence which inclosed the stable where Tornado was confined. did Laughing Leo turn his face toward his partner. When he did, his hand gripped that of the big rancher with a grip that would have crushed a less compact bundle of bones and sinew.

His face was whiter than ever in the twilight, and there was a pinched look about his nostrils, deep lines around his lips, that told

how killing had been the struggle. But his voice was steady and firm as he uttered:

"I didn't think it was left in me, but you've brought it out, pard. I was a devil, back yonder. Now I'm a man-and I owe it to you!"

It was not often that Spread Eagle Sam felt at a loss for words to express his feelings, but this was one of those rare occasions. He gulped down that troublesome lump, but as often as he strove to speak, it rose up and choked him. His massive features were frightfully contorted, but there was an unusually soft light in his great eyes. And as the partners stood with tight clasped hands, each one felt that this dastardly outrage had brought them still closer together; that from this hour on they were more than brothers in love.

In silence they crossed the inclosure and opened the stable door, from beyond which still came those ear-splitting screams from the

locoed racer.

There was still ample light for the box-stall and its occupant to be clearly seen, though for a moment a dizzy blur came before the eyes breathing of his beloved steed, between those horror. horrible screams.

fours, returning his look with a ghost of recog-

nition.

"The spell is workin' off-but don't be too resky, pard!" warningly muttered Spread Eagle Sam, with his lips close to the ear of his friend, knowing how the human voice, at times, will send a horse suffering as this one was, into renewed spasms.

If Laughing Leo heard, he gave no sign. He strode close to the heavily barred door, casting off his hat the more perfectly to reveal his

features, his voice clear yet soothing: "Tornado, old fellow! give us your hand-

Truly there is magic in the human voice! The poor horse pricked forward his ears, his trembling disappearing, a low affectionate whicker coming from his froth-tinged muzzle. And at the last words, it even lifted one fore-foot, blindly extending it as it had so often done when in health, to be shaken by its loved master.

A hopeful light came into the eyes of the young rancher. Surely the creature could not be so badly off, if it could recognize him so quickly—if it could recall the old commands

like this?

"The wu'st o' this spell is bout over, I reckon," muttered Ingalls as he read this hope in the eyes of his partner, but slowly shaking his head. "Fer the time, only. He's got it too mighty bad—wuss luck."

But Laughing Leo could not believe this, just then, and before his more cautious partner could lift a hand to hinder, he flung the bars open and stepped quickly inside, one hand

extended to accept the paw.

Too soon his eyes were opened to the truth. Tornado started back, shivering afresh, its eyes blazing up, its lips drawn back until the white teeth were revealed. Then-with a savage, maniacal scream, the black racer reared up before its master, the very personification of insane fury, springing forward and striking at Laughing Leo with its iron-shod hoofs.

CHAPTER V.

BLOODHOUND OR POODLE? A LOOK was certainly interchanged by father and daughter, but if it was one of apprehension, Finn McAvoy made a rapid recovery.

A perplexed expression came into his dark face, his beavy brows contracting, his thick lips

pursing as he shook his head slowly.

"Is it a wild b'aste ye'r' brandin' wid that outlandish name, sor? Sure there'd ought to be an in ire berd ov thim, be the awful len'th av itthe stretch av a thrail-rope betune the hid an' the tail!"

A look of doubt and perplexity chased the confident anticipation from the face of the stranger, and his steed backed away from that of the giant, just as its master would have recoiled had he been standing upon his own feet.

"Beg pardon, sir, but-I don't think-eh?" Queen Sate broke into a clear, ringing laugh, and the stranger turned toward her with a gasp of relief, the broad smile returning much as it had faded away as the woman spoke:

"Tnat's poor old dad's herd of buffaloes, to balance yours, dear sir!" her lustrous eyes dancing with a double share of mischief. "If he ever tries to rally you over this little adventure, just ask him if he ever knew-I'm not quite sure that I can pronounce the name myself, without hearing it once more! You said-"

"Melchoir Parkindale, ma'am, Masculine gender-singular person-remarkably singular, too! Hiding from a fortune, as though there was three parts of a miss tacked on to the end of

it! Mis-fortune: see?" Finn McAvoy uttered a long whistle, arching

his shaggy brows. "I wouldn't be sure it was hoidin', sor, av I

was in your shoes. Sure, the weight av that name is plinty enough for to sink a man over his hid out av soight iv he happened to sthraggle onto a soft spot in the soil—the saints sthick a hollow sthraw down to his miserable nostrils, to kape the brith av loife in his shmotherin' lungs whoile ye folly him up be the scent av his thrail, sor! Good luck be his!"

Queen Sate laughed merrily as the stranger cautiously edged a little closer to her side, placing her between himself and the giant rancher, whose broadened brogue seemed to give him an uneasy feeling of danger. And the lustrous eye that was nearest the stranger gave just the ghost of a wink, overflowing with roguishness, as she uttered in a theatrical aside:

"Whist, daddy dear! Will ye brush the hair from the teeth av ye, wid the front av yer back in the face av the sthranger, befure he has comprehinsion that it's Frinch we was whin we made the woorld wiser an' betther be comin' into it widout sthoppin' to-ow! wasn't it the turrible narrow iscale I made, jist!" and the merry witch clapped one gloved hand over her stirrup. of Laughing Leo as he heard the short, choking row mouth, her jetty brows arching in mock

Finn McAvoy smiled grimly. The stranger There came a sudden silence, and dashing laughed feebly, uncertainly, like one who is not a hand across his eyes, Laughing Leo looked to quite positive he has fallen into the company of see Tornado, quivering in every muscle, a wild, persons entirely sane. Basil Brock frowned unnatural fire in his eyes, but standing on all- and bit his lips savagely, his insane jealousy finding food to feed its flames even in the meeting with this tenderfoot.

> "There is no such person as you mention in these parts, sir," he bluntly interposed, dettly sending his horse in between the ones ridden by his love and his present aversion. "You will have to look further for your Melchoir Parkindale."

> Queen Sate flashed a burning glance into his darkened face, and there was an impatient echo to her voice as she uttered:

> "To the best of your knowledge, better add, Mr. Brock. 'As for me, somehow the name sounds familiar! Where have I heard it before?"

> "Never mind the Melchoir, ma'am, if you can pin down the Parkindale half of it!" eagerly uttered the stranger, crowding Basil Brock until that gentleman's horse, with an irritated plunge, slipped out of the uncomfortable press. "Melchoir or heirs-girl, boy, woman, man! We'll take the sprouts if we can't get the original trunk! And precious glad of it, too! Yes, sirma'am, I intended—excuse me!"

> Queen Sate turned a swift glance upon Finn McAvoy, and that gentleman instantly became what he was on most occasions, a frank appearing, correctly spoken, hospitable personage. With a native grace he lifted the broad-brimmed hat from his head, bowing to the stranger as he uttered:

> "It is a sorry welcome you have received thus far, I'm afraid, my dear sir, but we will try our best to make amends. My ranch is yours, while you!favor this section, and any service we can render you is yours before you take the trouble of asking it. Little woman!"

> "Yes, father," demurely murmured Queen Sate, looking meek as an angel as a touch of the spur brought her horse a little closer.

> "Our guest, daughter," with a bow and motion of his bronzed hands. "Miss McAvoy,

> The stranger was stretching out a hand to grasp that of the giant rancher, but he hastily withdrew it with the ceremony unperformed, fumbling in his bosom with eager haste, his eyes glowing and his lips pursed up with comical excitement. He brought forth a portly note-book, from which he extracted a glazed card bowing low as he handed it to the smiling, amused rancher.

> "Most prominent firm in the city, sir! Business executed with neatness, precision and dispatch, sir! Do a land-office business, and-

> "Sarah, permit me to commend this gentleman to your favorable consideration," said Finn McAvoy, with preternatural politeness, his face fairly owlish with gravity as he held the bit of pasteboard where the rays of the setting sun fell upon its face, adding: "Mr. Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale-Miss Sarah Anne McAvoy!"

> "Most happy to-eh?" staring at the big rancher with astonished eyes, then breaking into a hearty laugh at what he considered a comical blunder, not on his own part, however. "That's good-extraordinarily good, I may say! If I only dare repeat it when I get back to the city; but I wouldn't, you know!" suddenly ceasing to laugh, his red face growing preternaturally grave as he added: "They mightn't like it, you know. Awfully respectable firm-top of the profession, and all that; but solemn-most depressingly solemn, I assure you!"

> There was a puzzled look on the face of Queen Sate, and only those who knew her best would even have suspected her earnestness as she uttered the words:

> "Do all who live in the city have to carry such terribly long names, Mr. Knifton Bragg

> "Cicero Boggs, ma'am, confidential clerk to Messrs. Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale, of Minneapolis," with a low bow that was intended to

hide the broad grin of amusement—a grin that almost brought a savage blow from the quivering stock-whip carried by Basil Brock.

Queen Sate snatched the card from the fingers of her father, an admirably counterfeited blush of mingled amusement and shame mantling her velvet cheeks as she glanced swiftly over the printed words. It was indeed the business card of a law firm, but low down in one corner and printed in red ink, she saw the name of Cicero Boggs.

"Never mention it, ma'am," eagerly added the lawyer's clerk, with a low bow and a smirk that wanted very much to be a laugh. "It's an honor for a man like me to be mistaken for the great and eminent firm of Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale, even for one short minute! This will ever be recalled as the proudest hour of my life, I assure you—ow!"

A start of his horse, against which Basil Brock had thrust an armed boot as he pressed up, caused Cicero Boggs to flinch and double up with pain as his foot was twisted in the

"Time is passing, Miss McAvoy, and the ranch is still some distance away," almost grufily muttered the jealous young rancher. "Shall we ride on, leaving your father to finish with this-gentleman?"

There was an ugly sneer on his lips as he uttered the title, after a brief pause that was, as he made it, almost insulting. And so Queen Sate appeared to regard it, for her figure was drawn rigidly erect, and her tones were almost icy cold as she responded:

"Don't let me detain you, Mr. Brock. I am not afraid of the twilight, and even if there was any danger to be apprehended, I could have nothing to fear with this gentleman and father to guard me."

"You mean that he is going with you?"

frowningly. "Unless he prefers to accept your hospitality, sir," sharply interposed Finn McAvcy, with a

dark frown and warning glance. Cicero Boggs glanced rapidly from face to face, a faint smile stealing over his own as he said with a bow to Queen Sate:

"If I am not intruding, ma'am, why-" "You are my guest by right of prior discovery, Mr. Boggs," with a positive nod, that caused the worthy clerk to give a deep sigh of relief. "And as it is growing late—and I am growing awfully hungry-perhaps we had best be traveling. Father?"

"Wiser word was never spoken, if it does come from the lips of my own daughter," laughed the big rancher, wheeling his horse alongside that of Basil Brock, adding: "Will we see you in the morning, lad? I'll not ask ye to ride so far out of your way this late, after the day's work. For, of course, ye'll be wantin' a good look after the bonny bay horse that's to add to your herd the morrow, and put a few yellow boys into these same pockets into the bargain—d'ye mind, now?"

Basil Brock frowned darkly, with an ugly glarce toward the complacent face of the clerk, who was already chatting freely with Queen Sate. As though she felt the power of that look the Amazon turned her face toward him, nodding slightly as she cried:

"Good-night, Sir Knight of the Doleful Phiz! May the new day lend a more cheerful light to your face, or the bad omen will make me bet all my spare change on gallant Tornado—sure!"

Basil Brock flushed hotly as he bowed. He was too angry to trust his voice as he accepted his dismissal. And with spurs buried in its quivering flanks, his good horse bore him away at top speed.

"Rather, eh, peppery?" murmured Cicero Boggs, with a glance after the jealous rider. "Acts like something had bitten him!"

A vivid light leaped into the eyes of the lady, and Cicero Boggs might have taken warning Iv this, only for the swiftly vailing lids, and the unaccountable, to him, manner in which Queen Sate's horse seemed to take fright at nothing, bounding forward and prancing for several minutes.

There was but little conversation on the way to Emerald Ranch, and as that little bad no particular bearing on this story, it need not be recorded here.

Cicero Boggs was made heartily welcome, after the free-and-easy style of the section. He expressed his surprise at finding such a comfortable, almost elegant, residence in what be bad, until then, considered little less than a desert, beyond the confines of civilization. When once inside the building, he might have thought himself an inmate of a country residence near his beloved city.

After the supper, to which all did ample justice, the trio passed into an adjoining room, where Finn McAvoy produced liquor and cigars, the two men smoking while Queen Sate with her own fair hands, mixed a generous jerum of steaming hot punch. And she had her glass, too, sipping its contents as though she liked it, adding no little to the genuine comfort and pleasure of the hour.

But Cicero Boggs proved himself a true man of business, and though his bost seemed inclined to postpone all such matters for the present, he blandly insisted on introducing himself in proper form.

"The firm would never forgive me, sir, for putting pleasure before business," he said with sudden gravity, as he opened his capacious notebook and took from it sundry papers. "Business, though the heavens crack open and take a tumble! Their motto, sir! And, as their confidential clerk, I may add, my motto, too!"

The generous punch seemed to lend his naturally glib tongue increased volubility, and with amazing rapidity he explained the business which had brought him to that region.

Many long years before, an Englishman named Melchoir Parkindale had disappeared, leaving no clew behind by which he might be traced.

For many long years it appeared as though no person had any desire to or motive for tracing him. But then, through a death in far-away

England, that motive arose. "An e-nor-mous fortune, sir—and ma'am!" with a sudden after-thought, turning and ducking his close-cropped head toward Queen Sate, who seemed much more deeply impressed with the story than her father. "Nearly half a million pounds of English currency—two and a half million dollars! Reasons enough for finding the unfindable, sir! Reasons enough and motive enough-why, sir-and ma'am-with as e-nor-mous incentive for close searching and thorough sifting, I'd almost agree to bring back in perfect state a single drop of fresh water that had been cast into the very middle of the vast Atlantic Ocean! I-would-so!"

Cicero Boggs went on to detail how the case had been taken up by his firm, on speculation; how they had stumbled across what they had every reason to believe was a valuable

clew to the missing heir. "A hint that Melchoir Parkindale was to be found in this very section, my dear sir," nodded Cicero Boggs, with sparkling eyes and a fresh glass of punch half way to his lips. "And there's big money for any or all who helps the firm of Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale to success in the undertaking-big money, sir!"

But Finn McAvoy did not appear to take an overwhelming interest in the matter. Either his hard day's work, or the strong punch, or both combined, seemed to make him sleepy. And when the voluble clerk paused to let that assertion sink deep into the mind of his host, the giant rancher availed himself of the opportunity to slip away and pass out of the build-

Nothing daunted, Cicero Boggs turned to Queen Sate and devoted himself to her, since all else had failed. And Queen Sate seemed to the full as deeply interested in the case as he could wish, though she reluctantly admitted that, to the best of her belief, she had never even heard the name of Melchoir Parkindale uttered before it passed his own lips that even-

ing. Still, that don't count," she said, with a smile so charming that Cicero did not even recognize the bit of slang. "In this section, there is many a man who prefers to travel under a name other than the one he received from his parents-for

reasons!" The lawyer's clerk gave a little start, and cast a quick glance over his shoulder, his manner growing just a trifle more subdued, as though this observation had awakened a lulled apprehension. And though a little laugh accompanied the words, there was something like a tremor in the query which next passed his lips.

"I suppose there's nothing in the terrible tales told in the city about the many criminals running around unmuzzled in these parts?"

Queen Sate laughed softly, one white hand stealing across the table and gently tapping the clerk on an arm as she whispered:

"Did you notice how peculiarly the young gentleman who was with us this evening acted toward you, my dear sir?"

"It was peculiar, then?" asked Boggs, with a faint smile. "Do you know, Miss McAvoy, I fancied that was his natural manner!"

"Natural enough, after all," with a repetition of that soft laugh. "Natural enough, since he suspected you of being a detective in disguise!" There was a laugh on her lips, a smile on her

face, but there was neither the one nor the other in her great eyes as they fastened upon his face with strange intentness, seeking to read the truth of her own strong suspicions before her opposite could perfect his mask-if, indeed, he was wearing one at all.

She saw only a perplexed doubt. Cicero Boggs looked the picture of amazement. Certainly he showed neither fear nor mortification, as he might were he what she more than suspec-

ted. "Is it a joke, ma'am?" he finally ventured, forcing a smile as though duty bound to show his appreciation in such a case.

"To us, of course, since we know just who and what you are," was the response, with sudden and portentous gravity "A jest to us, provided father can convince Basil Brock of your innocence before that young hot-head makes a decisive move."

"Eh? You mean—you don't mean—" "That father has gone to see Basil Brock, or

to send him word that you are not the blood-

hound of the law he suspects. May he be successful-may heaven forbid the tragedy I fear!" with a shiver and a nervous glance around them. "If Basil Brock should come before receiving that assurance—well, we'll hope not!"

"Decidedly-hope not!" muttered Cicero Boggs, with a ghastly smile on his face as he hitched his chair a little nearer his fair hostess. "But it's all a joke--you said it was a jest, I believe?"

Queen Sate heaved a sigh, and the pitying look in her glorious eyes brought the clerk yet a little nearer her side.

Cicero forced a laugh with no little effort, as

he said: "A good joke—a most admirable jest! And yet-don't you think, Miss McAvoy, that it is a little-just a leetle hard on the young gentleman?"

"Which, being interpreted, means?" "Why, if he is so bitter against a detective, he must have done something to give birth to

that fear, don't you see? And so-eh?" "He killed a man-or was it two?" with a musing look at vacancy that lasted a moment, then gave way to a languid indifference. "1 really forget, but it doesn't matter; he or they were detectives."

"He! he!" faintly giggled Boggs, furtively brushing his brow as though the room had suddenly grown uncomfortably warm, though a perceptible shiver ran over his frame at the same moment. "Another jest! You are soso facetious, dear ma'am! I never enjoyed myself more in all my-what was that?" giving a start, and looking as though strongly inclined to duck under the table.

"Really, I did not catch the sound. Was it anything like a shot? If so, father may have met Mr. Brock," and Queen Sate lifted a white hand to hide a languid yawn.

Cicero Boggs did not make even a pretense at laughing, now. His blue eyes were wildly protruding, his face changed color, and his hand trembled so that the glass he sought to refill clicked sharply against the edge of the punch bowl.

Queen Sate opened her eyes widely, an amused surprise filling them as she gazed keenly into his face. And there was an echo of wonder in her voice as she exclaimed:

"Is it possible? Surely you are not alarmed, Mr. Boggs?"

"Well, not just that," with a feeble effort toward a smile. "But it sounded so strange, coming from your fair lips, that-"

"About those detectives?" with a curling lip, as she deftly refilled his glass. "When you have lived in these parts a few years, Mr. Boggs, such trifles will have no more effect upon your nerves than they do on mine. There's scarcely a week passes without something of the sort happening."

"You mean—surely, ma'am, I haven't caught

your meaning?" "My fault, of course," was the polite response. "I keep forgetting that you are a stranger to our little peculiarities. Listen, and I'll try to make my meaning more clear:

"I told you that it was quite an ordinary thing for men to drop their real names when they come here. To be painfully blunt, they take other names so that their past deeds may not be so readily traced up to their last place of residence. The law knows this, and when a man is wanted particularly, the law sends its hounds up in this quarter, knowing that the scent may most likely be struck with the least delay.

"Well, a detective is of little use, as such, if he is a fool. If he is no fool, he knows that in making such a venture he is taking his life in his own hands, ready for the one who may prove his superior in smartness, or with the pistol. And so-well, once in a while he takes his game back with him, but oftener he stops right where he found or was found by his man."

"In other words, he is murdered!" with a shiver. "We don't call it by such a harsh name,"

frowning. "And—surely Mr. Brock didn't take me for a

detective?" "Such was my fancy, at the time, though I may have been mistaken. Possibly he was simply jealous because you looked at me," was the placid response, as Queen Sate daintily sipped her punch. "He is rather inclined to

be jealous, at odd spells." "Good heavens, ma'am!" excitedly ejaculated Cicero, almost leaping from his chair as he vigorously pushed it clear around to the opposite side of the table. "And I'm a married man! With a wife! With five innocent babes that

call me papa! With-with-" "That may make some difference, sure enough," nodded Queen Sate, reflectively. "Pity you didn't bring your family with you. But I'll tell Mr. Brock in the morning, if I don't forget it. Please remind me should it slip my mind, won't you, dear sir?"

"I don't-don't think I'll be here," stammered poor Boggs, his eyes glassy as those of a fish. "I don't believe our client is to be discovered in these parts. I'm losing faith in that supposed clew-losing it with marvelous rapidi- say what he was otherwise incapable of.

ty, ma'am! I reckon I'd save time by making an early start in the morning-or this very night! Why not?"

"I think I'd advise the use of daylight, Mr. Boggs," with chilling dryness. "Traveling by night is mighty unhealthy for strangers in this section. And then, the gathering to-morrow for the race. Everybody will be there, and you could learn for certainty whether or no your Melchoir Parkindale is to be found here."

Cicero Boggs groaned beneath his breath, looking the very picture of uneasy apprehension. But he gave a sudden start as a low, mocking laugh parted the red lips of his fair hostess, and his color changed in spite of himself as he looked up to see her leaning across the table, her great eyes keenly reading his countenance, a smile that was almost a sneer curling her lips as she uttered:

"You play the part to perfection, my dear sir, but don't you think it is time to drop the mask, now I have taken a square look beneath

"I don't-

"Bah!" sinking back in her chair with a short, hard laugh of contempt. "Your name is not Cicero Boggs. You are no lawyer's clerk. You never expected or wished to find a man by the name of Melchoir Parkindale. You are a detective; who are you trailing?"

"Is it another joke?" with a faint grin. "You'll find it a terribly grim jest, or I'm way off my base! I knew you were other than you wished to appear at the first fair look. I have keen eyes, but there are many another pair in this neighborhood equally as sharp. What I have discovered, others will discover. What I have recalled, others may recall—for we are not all fixtures here, bear in mind. Sometimes we leave the range for a ramble through civilization, and when there we use our eyes"

Cicero Boggs listened to this rapid speech with open lips and eyes that threatened to pop from their sockets. As Queen Sate ceased speaking, his jaws closed with an audible click, then reopened to say:

"Then I've got lost on the way! Then somebody changed me while I slept! For when I left Minn-"

"Chicago, you mean!" "Chi-eh?" gasped the fellow, oewilderedly. "Your name is Wirt Dalton," uttered Queen Sate, leaning forward and emphasizing each sentence by a tap on his arm. "You are a pet detective in the employ of the Pinkerton Agency. You have come here as a bloodhound to track down some criminal, or what you call a criminal. Mind that you do not feel the fangs at your own throat first!"

"But I tell you, ma'am, I'm simply Cicero

Boggs, the confi-" "Have it so, if you prefer," interposed Queen Sate, sinking back in her chair, once more languid and indifferent. "I was speaking solely for your own good, and if you don't care enough for your life to accept a friendly warning, the consequences rest on your own head-my conscience is clear!

"Pray have a little more punch, Mr. Boggs?" with a winning smile, as she took up the silver ladle and dipped it deep into the bowl.

TWO OF A KIND.

In anything but an agreeable humor Basil Brock spurred rapidly away from the trio, his brows gathered in a dark, suspicious scowl, his brown eyes glowing redly with the hot passion behind them.

And yet, had the question been put to him, he could hardly have told at what this rage or suspicion was directed. For, whatever else he might have thought of this clumsy tenderfoot, he most assuredly never for an instant classed him with those hounds of the law, as Queen Sate had so strongly hinted.

It was enough for him to know that this smirking, flashily dressed fellow from the city was basking in the smiles of the woman whom he loved so passionately. That he was riding by her side, gazing into her glorious eyes, listening to her musical tones, and of course even at this early stage of the game beginning to fall captive to those united charms.

"She'll fool him on to the top of his bent! She'll make him think that his foot is fairly on the threshold of paradise, before she slams the

gate in his grinning face!" Even in his mad jealousy Basil Brock did not go further than that. Queen Sate might flirt with the fellow, just as she would flirt with a blind and crippled centenarian for lack of better material; but beyond flirting she would not go. He knew this as firmly as he knew that the red sun was just then sinking out of sight beyond the western horizon, yet the bare idea of the woman he wished all for his own even flirting with another sent his hot blood madly through his veins.

Basil Brock was one of those unfortunate beings given completely over to the dread demon of jealousy. At the slightest provocation this demon would awaken, and while under its bandful influence, the young rancher would do and

It was this insane jealousy that led to much, if not all, of the annoyance and trouble that had overtaken the firm of Laughlin & Ingalls.

Until Queen Sate had begun to smile too frequently upon the younger and handsomer member of that firm, all had gone well enough with them. So many long miles intervened between the two ranches—the "Triangle" and the "B. B." as known from the respective brands—that for some little time Basil Brock was in ignorance of the frequent meetings between Laughing Leo and Queen Sate. And this ignorance was increased by an enforced absence from the range for some time through important business.

It was not long after his return, however, before his too-ready suspicions were awakened. His love was so earnest after its kind, that he had never made the slightest pretense at disguising it from the public eye, and there were enough to carry him malicious tales of what had been going on during his absence.

Never mind the minor details! Enough that Basil Brock from that day on never let an opportunity pass him unimproved. He had openly sought a quarrel with Laughing Leo, but thanks to the new course in life which he had marked out. Laughlin declined to meet him half-way.

With a forbearance which fairly paralyzed Spread Eagle Sam, Leo quietly ignored the sneers, hints, and even insults, and as soon as he divined the prime cause of all this, he almost entirely dropped the acquaintance with the Emerald Ranch, although he had begun to find it very agreeable.

Not that he was in love, or in any danger of becoming so. Amusing enough he found Queen Sate—something like a bumper of champagne to an unseasoned throat-sharp and stinging, with a peculiar sweetness mingling with the rest, but leaving a taste that was unwholesome.

Ever after parting with her his thoughts would revert to Luada Kirkendall as he had known her last; and Queen Sate was ever the sufferer. And when Spread Eagle Sam ventured to clumsily joke him on the subject, Laughing Leo would shake his head negatively.

"Not if she was ten times as handsome, and a thousand times as rich in prospective, pard. She's good company, and all that, but when I want a woman, I want a woman all over."

Scarcely as polished an expression as it might have been, perhaps, but Spread Eagle Sam quickly caught his meaning, and that was the main point.

Now, Basil Brock was an ugly enemy for new beginners in that section to have. He was rich, and one of the largest feeders in those parts. He was liked well enough, despite his hot temper, by the majority of the ranchers; and the few who might have had "sneaking notions" of Queen Sate themselves, seemed overawed by his greater pretensions.

Finn McAvoy was an open advocate of his claims, and it had come to be pretty generally understood that an engagement existed between the young couple which would, in due time, end

in a grand jollification for them all. That this had not transpired long before now, was through no lack of persuasion on the part of Basil Brock. Time and time again had he put his fate to the test, only to be foiled by the quick-witted, nimble-tongued Belle of the Range, just as on this evening.

The truth was that Queen Sate had taken a strong fancy to the young member of the new firm. That she was, if not actually in love with Laughing Leo, at least willing he should be another of her many captives. She spared no pains to bring this about, and though Laughing Leo never visited the Emerald Ranch of late, or threw himself in her way, she managed to meet him frequently enough to prevent his forgetting her beauty-far too often for the serenity of Basil Brock, though he did not know of half those "chance" encounters.

For once his fierce jealousy was well founded. Queen Sate needed but precious little encouragement to change from fancy to love, deep and ardent. And had Laughing Leo acted with less scrupulous reserve of late, if he had given her but half a chance to yield without actually flinging herself at his head-"Basil Brock might go hang!" as the very plain-spoken young lady

privately expressed herself. Better for the new firm, perhaps, had Queen Sate been a trifle less ready with her tongue. She let Basil Brock learn something of her growing sentiment in favor of Laughing Leo, and from that hour his course was laid out. If

Laughing Leo would not fight, he should run. "Fight, run or ruin!" came through his grating teeth as he sped on toward the B. B. Ranch. "I'd prefer the first, but the fellow has turned to a veritable cur since he left the road for the range. I'd think those old tales all lies, if there was even the ghost of a chance for an error to have slipped in-but there is not! I took pains to make everything certain before passing on. He is the man-and he's my meat!"

There was more than jealousy of woman in those hissing accents, and in that fierce, deadly scowl. It was not only because of Queen Sate that Basil Brock hated Laughing Leo.

"The cur vows he's come to stay, so it won't

be run. That leaves ruin, and I'll take a right smart bite out of the Triangle on the morrowif that infernal red-skin has done his work as well as he promised! If not-talk of the devil!" sharply reining in his horse just in time to keep from riding down a dark figure that suddenly sprung out from behind a clump of weeds, under which it seemed impossible for a human being to have lain concealed.

"Red-foot!"

"Red-foot is here—master."

There was a slight pause before the title was given, as though it came less easily than the other words, and there was a peculiar movement of the bare head that came near being a toss. Indian though this slender being might be, he did not lack for pride, it seemed.

"And with some clumsy excuse for failure, I'm betting odds!" viciously snapped the young rancher, bending over in the saddle, the better to read the tidings contained in that dusky face.

"You would lose, master," was the quiet re-

"What!" with savage intensity. "You have done the job? Dare to lie to me, you red rascal, and I'll take the hide off your back by inches with my whip!"

"Strike once-never strike again, master!" ejaculated Red-foot, leaping back with the lightness of a panther, a gleaming knife appearing in his hand, balanced by the point between thumb and finger, ready for the death-flight at an instant's warning.

Basil Brock had let one hand drop to the polished handle of his stock-whip as he uttered that fierce threat, but it was a purely mechanical motion. He never thought of carrying out that threat, for he knew well enough that this fellow would not dare attempt to utter a lie to his face on such an important subject. It was simply his way; he should have been born a Russian autocrat.

A short, fierce laugh came through his white teeth as he lifted his empty hand with a gesture of placation. There was a smile upon his flushed face that told he was not angry. This unexpected spirit in one whom, until then, he had looked upon as little better than a dog, since he was gifted with the power of speech, really pleased him. His tool was more valuable than he had given him credit for being.

"Put up your knife, Red-foot," he said, with an approving echo in his tones. "I was only

testing your nerve."

"If I lacked nerve, would I have taken this the red-skin. job?" coldly uttered the red-skin, his gleaming weapon vanishing somewhere about his person. "Would I have risked being caught by the man who laughs as he kills, or the big buffalo king?"

"Or have returned to tell me of your failureand that would be a still more daring deed, Redfoot!" laughed Basil Brock, showing his teeth as he sprung to the ground, leaving his horse to follow at will as he moved onward, accompanied by the slender red-skin.

Red-foot made no response to this addition, but strode on in silence through the deepening twilight. His bronzed features showed no signs of emotion as Basil Brock scanned them keenly, intently. And more than ever the young rancher realized that he had underestimated this tool of his, vagabond and worthless loafer as he had until now considered him.

For the first time he caught himself beginning to wonder who and what this red-skin really was. Never until then had he thought of bim as a man, content to use the convenient tool which he found ready for his service.

And, somehow, Red-foot appeared to have undergone a change, strange and complete. He no longer looked or talked like the idle, degraded, worthless vagabond of recent days. His slouching, lazy shuffle was gone, and he walked erect, his footsteps springy, his lithe form full of grace, despite the rags that alone covered his Brock, surlily. nakedness. Even his voice and manner of speaking had changed for the better. His sentences were sharp and distinct, without the drawling accent which had—if he remembered aright—marked them before.

Really, if his eyes had not told him better, he could have thought his companion a white

"And you've done the job, Red-foot?" he

asked, breaking the brief silence. "Red-foot promised. What he says, he does," was the terse response.

"And the black racer is dead? You tell me that?"

Basil Brock paused as the red-skin made an abrupt gesture with one hand. A dark frown shot into his face, and his teeth clicked sharply with angry suspicion; but he waited for the redskin to explain.

"What was it the master said to Red-foot?" "It's what you've done that I'm most interested in. Out with it in a word, curse you!" grated the hot-tempered rancher, making a grasp at the red-skin, to be evaded by a swift movement.

Red-foot confronted him, one hand resting on the haft of his knife, repeating slowly: "What was it the master said to Red-foot?"

Basil Brock smothered a savage curse as best

he could, and though he could scarcely refrain from leaping at the throat of his stubborn emissary, he managed to utter:

"I hired you to kill that black horse of Leo Laughlin's."

Red-foot shook his bare head vigorously, the ghost of a smile curling his thin lips.

"Wrong, master! It was not kill." Basil Brock grew cold and steady, with alarming suddenness. If Red-foot only knew it, he was playing with his own life.

"Never mind the precise words I used. My meaning was clear enough for even you to understand what I wanted, what I was willing to pay for. In one word-did you kill that black devil?"

"Not kill-better than kill, master," with a

low laugh.

The young rancher frowned blackly. He knew what a marvel Tornado was, and he could feel assured of full success only when he knew that death had claimed the racer.

"Tell me just what you have done, and tell it quick, Red-foot," he uttered, with dangerous quietness. "I want to know just how much I owe you. I'm in a hurry to pay you off." There was a hidden meaning in the words,

but the red-skin did not seem to perceive it. Or, it may be, he felt able to guard himself. A complete change came over him. He

laughed lightly, casting to one side his assumed dignity. And more than ever like a white man were his words and manner of speaking. "All right. I've had my turn, just as you

had yours at first. You treated me like a cur: I have treated you as one man treats another, his equal in all save color of skin. Now to business:

"You hired me to doctor the black horse, over yonder. I agreed to do your work for your pay. I have done it, and-"

"He is dead, then?" interposed Brock, breathlessly.

"He is not dead, but he might better be. He is crazy—locoed!"

Basil Brock ground an angry curse between his teeth. "That is not enough, curse you for an idiot!

That horse is a very demon, I tell you! And his master-double devil that he is!-will cure or make his horse forget your weeds! If there's a spark of life in the demon, he'll make him win against all odds!"

"Did you ever see a horse go mad from eating the rattling weed, master?" coolly asked

"I've heard of them often enough, and I

know-"

"That the laughing man would a thousand times rather see his good runner stone dead than to find him as be has, before this," rapidly interposed the red-skin. "That he has all the loss, without even a drop of comfort. If his horse was dead, he could point to the carcass and say 'Look! it is not my fault that the race is

Basil Brock laughed, hardly, triumphantly. "That wouldn't save his five hundred head. I took care to make the race play or pay!" "Then it is only the horns and hoofs the

master cares for?"

Basil Brock gave a start at the peculiar manner in which Red-foot put this query. Like a flash it came to him what was meant, and a bot flush accompanied the red light that leaped into his eyes.

The Indian laughed softly, then added

rapidly: "Red-foot is only a poor, ignorant Indian, but he has eyes and a brain. His foot is soft, and he can go here, there, everywhere, without making a noise to call eyes toward him. He sees more than his face shows, and he never forgets. What his ears takes in, his brain keeps until the juice is all sucked out. What-" "What has all this got to do with it?" growled

"Keep cool and perhaps you'll see," laughed Red-foot, with another rapid change of manner. "I just wanted to show you how I came

to read more in your face than I heard from your lips. "If I had stolen in and cut the throat, or sent my knife to the heart of the black horse, you would have been satisfied, for the time;

for then you could not have lost your big bet. But I looked further than that. I saw-listen, master! "The black racer will die, for I waited long

enough to see him eat freely of the rattle-weed. But he will not die to-morrow, nor next day. He will not be dead for the laughing man to show when the time for the big race comes. He will be sick-maybe crazy with one of the fitsbut what of that? When the laughing man says look! the master can laugh and ask what drug it was he gave him."

At last Basil Brock fully realized what the red-skin was driving at, and a laugh of malicious triumph hissed through his teeth. Let the black racer win, if he could! It was not the amount at stake he cared for, great as that certainly was. If the black horse showed signs of the "rattle-weed," that was enough. A chance to charge Laughing Leo before the gathered crowd-before Queen Sate herself!-with discounting a defeat by drugging his champion, would be worth double the wager!

In his vindictive joy he thumped Red-foot on the back with a vigor that caused the Indian to flinch.

"You're right, Red-foot! That's worth ten times the stake, even if I should lose it tomorrow!"

"Won't lose-win bet and have laugh, both," confidently nodded his unscrupulous tool, grinning broadly. "That worth money, eh?"

"I'll double the sum, and thank you into the bargain!" laughed the young rancher as he whistled up his horse and leaped into the saddle. "What! don't that satisfy you, you cormorant?" with arching brows as he saw Red-foot slowly shake his head.

"Money good-heap good!" grunted Redfoot, lapsing into the traditional manner of his

race. "Then what's the matter with you? What are you looking so confounded grumpy about? you agreed to do the work for so many dollars, and of my own accord I've offered to double that amount. That's enough to satisfy any hog!"

"Red-foot no hog," shortly uttered the redskin, drawing his torn and greasy blanket about his shoulders. "Red-foot want squaw!"

Basil Brock stared at the fellow in open-eyed amazement.

"Want a squaw? Well, what I've got to do with that? Think I keep a red-skinned harem?"

"Don't know what harem: don't want harem:

want squaw!" Basil Brock broke into an impatient laugh,

then uttered sharply: "That's enough nonsense, old fellow. You can talk white talk when you feel in the humor, and I don't know of a better time for showing your skill in that direction than right now and here. Tell me what you want, in terms that I can understand, and then I will answer you."

Red-foot laughed softly. Apparently he was a bit of a wag, after his own peculiar fashion, and enjoyed puzzling this master of his, who was a little too apt to treat him with less consideration than he, Red-foot, fancied he de-:served.

"All right, sir, if you like it better that way. The money is all right, and I'll not throw it over

my shoulder, but-" "Look here, Red-foot," interposed Brock, curiosity overpowering him now that his greatest interest was satisfied. "You're something more than the Indian loafer and vagabond people in

these parts think you. Where did you learn to talk so like a white man?" "Talk Injun fashion if like dat better. Want squaw! Mus' hab squaw. Injun no good 'out squaw. Squaw cook-Injun eat. Dat right

way. Eatin' good-cookin' dam hard work!" Despite his chagrin Basil Brock was forced to laugh at this complete transformation. Not only in words, but in tones, in manner, Red-foot was now the genuine vagabond he had always thought him until this evening.

"I've nothing more to say, old fellow. Keep your secret if it suits you best. You've done the work I set you, and that is all I care

about." "All right it is, sir," promptly returned Redfoot of the white tongue. "As I started to say, I'll not refuse your doubled pay, but if you could hold back a portion of it and give me the value in something else, I'd be suited much better."

"A squaw, do you mean?" with a laugh. Red-foot shrugged his shoulders grimly. "I'm an Indian, as you know, but I'd rather take a squaw from almost any other pair of hands, sir!"

"What am I to infer from that?" sharply. "That if my skin is red, it is not that of a dog," was the cool retort. "That if I am an Indian in color, I am a white man at heart. And like other white men, I prefer to do my own court-

ing."
That's lucky, since you'll not be so apt to call on me to spark some dusky princess for you!" with a hard laugh. "Still I'm left in the dark. What is it you want? Curse you-speak out

plainly!" The sun had disappeared for some little time, but the full moon was just showing itself above the horizon. With a quick motion Red-foot turned so as to display his rags and tatters by

this silvery light, adding in words: "Is this the rig to go courting in, master?" "Hardly," laughed the young rancher. "But the money I'll give you will be enough to rig

you out like a prince, Red-foot!" "If there was a place to buy and sell close at hand-yes. But it is too far away-it takes too much time going and coming. The squaw mebbe not wait so long-mebbe hitch up some other Injun!"

Basil Brooke glanced keenly over the figure of the Indian, mentally comparing it with his own by no means robust form. Red-foot was slender, but well-built, and there was not so much difference there. Their hight was nearly the same. And, after all, he was an Indian. He would hardly complain if the fit of his coveted "courting dress" was a little loose!

"Come on to the ranch with me, Red-foot, and

I'll see what I can do for you," was his decision, as he again set his horse in motion. "I believe I've got just the thing to catch your eye, or the eye of your red princess, for that matter, if she likes color and glitter."

"Dat good!" grunted Red-foot, keeping pace with the horse. "Squaw like bright color. Come down dam quick when Red-foot show off all

bright like turkey gobbler!"

"I'll do my level best to make your strut a perfect success, old fellow, if only to be sure of your services when I may chance to need them again," laughed the young rancher.

And then, as they pressed on, he questioned the Indian as to how he managed to secure an entrance to the stable where the black racer was confined.

Red-foot, now that his dearest hopes were about to be realized, let his tongue wag freely, and though not much more time was consumed in reaching the ranch, his story was fully told and understood.

Basil Brock was in high glee as he entered the ranch, with Red-foot close at his heels. He bet- o' the rattle-weed even!" he inwardly muttered, terunderstood the peculiar working of the famed | as his free hand mechanically sought out the loco weed, now, and considered his wager as good as won, while he would have a doubly sweet revenge on his rival by hinting at selfdrugging to discount a defeat.

Red-foot seemed in equal good humor, despite his color. And when Basil Brock brought out a discarded suit of clothes, all color and glitter, with gold lace and bright metal buttons, his pleasure broke out after a fashion white rather than red.

The suit was fashioned after the Mexican style, and nothing was lacking to complete it. It was but little worn, for Basil Brock had soon discarded it after seeing how plainly his fellow ranchers dressed, and how "monkeyfied" it made him appear beside them, as Queen Sate herself had declared with proudly curling lips.

Red-foot showed some signs of wanting to try the rig on, then and there, but Basil persuaded him out of the notion. He even went so far as to hint at the propriety of a bath as a preliminary, and Red-foot was content to laugh at the insinuation instead of getting angry.

With the gay suit carefully wrapped up, and with his hire safely stowed away about his person, the red-skin took his departure, leaving his employer to his own thoughts.

Maliciously pleasant enough were they! "I wouldn't begrudge half my herds for tomorrow's sport!" he declared, with a hard, cruel laugh, as he saw in fancy the double defeat of the man he hated so intensely. "And she'll be there to see and hear! That's the cream of the whole affair! Queen Sate—my queen!"

CHAPTER VII.

"NO KNIFE CAN CUT OUR LOVE IN TWO!" So swift and unexpected was this attack that Laughing Leo would surely have gone down to death before those flashing hoofs, only for the strong hands of Spread Eagle Sam.

Far better than his Dandy Pard did the huge rancher understand the peculiar workings of the "rattle-weed," and though Laughing Leo paid no attention to his hasty remonstrance against venturing into the inclosure with the poisoned racer, Spread Eagle followed close in his tracks, a hand outstretched even before Tornado shrunk shivering from the master he had idolized in life. And picking his Dandy Pard up in his mighty arms as though his weight was no more than that of an infant, Spread Eagle Sam sprung through the barred door, actually feeling those steel-shod hoofs brush the garments covering his back as they came viciously down.

He flung Laughing Leo away from him the instant that leap was taken, turning with wonderful celerity to close and secure the barrier. Not an instant too soon.

Screaming frightfully, the locoed racer struck at the heavy bars with his hoofs, denting the hard wood deeply. He tore at them with his gleaming teeth, tearing out splinters marked with blood. He reared up and plunged forward with his entire weight, causing the strong structure to shake and quiver as though on the point of giving way.

Even Spread Eagle Sam gave a slight shudder as he saw and heard. What then must it have been to Laughing Leo, whose love for the black steed was so all-absorbing?

Bitter as death! Leaning against the side of the building where he had brought up when his giant pard flung him out of danger, Laughing Leo watched the frantic, blind fury of his beloved horse. His face was pale as that of a corpse, and he shuddered at brief intervals; but neither of these

symptons were born of personal fear. It may be doubted whether he really comprehended the extent of the peril from which the ready wit and strong hands of his partner had saved him. For the time being he had thoughts only for the tortured animal. He shivered when he saw the red blood tinging the froth of insanity. He turned still paler as he saw the abraded skin and great bruises swelling up as Tornado again and again hurled himself

against the unvielding barrier. Spread Eagle Sam satisfied himself that the 'know that, lad?"

fastenings were secure, then stepped back to the side of his Dandy Pard, intense sympathy written in his honest face and glowing in his big eyes. There was a strange gentleness, almost timidity, in his manner, that contrasted strongly with his huge bulk and rough exterior. And as his great right hand closed over that of his Dandy Pard, his touch was soft and gentle as that of a loving maiden.

"It's hard-monstrous bard, lad," he muttered, his voice husky and far from steady as he vainly sought a word of consolation.

Laughlin glanced into his sympathetic face, but only for an instant. Then his bloodshot eyes reverted to the locoed racer, following its every movement as though fascinated.

Spread Eagle Sam saw this, and his face grew still more troubled. Deep down in his heart he regretted that he had not left Tornado dead in his stall before carrying the tidings to his Dandy Pard. That would have been a terrible blow, but not equal to this.

"It'll drive him crazy-mad-wuss then a dose butt of a revolver.

Was it instinct that carried the eyes of Leo Laughlin after that hand? Surely he had made no sound, no motion sufficient to break that painfully intent gaze; yet there came a sharp, stern warning:

"Don't you do it, old man! Kill me first!" "It'd be a marcy to him, an' a double marcy to you, pard!" muttered the ex-hide-hunter, but removing his hand from the weapon. "You kin see fer yourself that the pore critter hes got his dose. You kin see fer yourself that he's better dead then livin' to suffer as he is sufferin' now. Hell's hottest fire on the head o' the imp as chucked the rattle-weed in his manger!"

Laughing Leo shivered anew as Tornado, still screaming, still panting and gasping in agony such as words are powerless to express, hurled his mighty bulk once more against the barrier, beating it with his plates, tearing it with his teeth, sending bloody splinters flying.

"You could kill him—you could send a bullet through his brain!" he muttered, like one scarce conscious of his own speech. "And you used to pet him—used to say you loved him!"

"That's the very why, lad. It'd come hard, but not so hard as to stan' idle here an' watch the pore critter suffer heap wuss then death by knife or bullet. So it'd be 'mighty hard ef it was a brother-ef it was you, pard, I saw sufferin' the same way. But ef I knowed that they wasn't any other cure than death-ef I knowed you'd hev to suffer with spells like that as long as the breath o' life was in you-I'd find the narve to send you peace an' rest, even ef in doin' it I hed to kiver my soul with murder!"

There were tears in the great blue eyes as he spoke, and tears in the voice that grew busky

and indistinct in his throat. Even in the depth of his trouble, Laughing Leo seemed to feel, as he had never before realized, the great love which his giant partner entertained for him. His cold fingers closed tightly about that muscular hand—the hand that had so recently saved him from being crushed to death beneath the hoofs of the steed he was mourning. But his bloodshot eyes never wavered from the black racer. And a painful gasp came from his lungs as he felt that all was over.

Tornado reeled back from the hoof and teethscarred barrier, an almost human groan of agony coming from his fluttering lungs. His trembling legs spread out wider in the effort to uphold the weight of his body. A brief swaying from side to side—then the locoed racer sunk down in a shivering, helpless heap on its litter.

"You've got your wish-Tornado is dead!" A flush of pain came into the bronzed face of the ex-hide-hunter at this bitter outburst, but he gave no other sign. He knew that his partner was more than half-crazed over this great sorrow, and that he was not accountable for the words he uttered.

He turned and gazed at Tornado. Not dead, for the wet flanks were quivering with the short, labored breathing.

"Better ef he was dead, pard," Sam muttered, setting the cold hand of his partner free, knowing that the peril was past for the present. "He's got too hefty a dose fer to ever be hisself ag'in, though he may not die as soon as I think at fu'st, fer-"

"He will live-over to-morrow?" quickly demand Laughlin, a strange fire shooting into his bloodshot eyes.

"Onless he hes another fit like that afore he kin 'cuperate a bit inside. Over to-morrowmebbe fer a week, or a month. But you ain't hopin' fer that, pard? Bad as it is to lose the noble critter, sech a lingerin' misery 'd be heap wuss!"

"There have been cases of complete recovery?" "So they say, but I never see one my own self. I've see'd hosses alive, long after bein' rattled, of course, but they never got back to be one-hafe what they was afore they ketched the dose. An' knowin' what he's bin, you wouldn't want to see him like that? Ef he was give' the say-so, he'd ruther take sudden death than hang on to life a stove-up cripple! You

Leo made no response in words, just then. He moved forward and once more opened the barrier, standing with folded arms over the locoed racer, gazing steadily down at the poor creature. There was a strange expression upon his white face that gave Spread Eagle Sam fresh uneasiness. For the moment he feared the brain of his Dandy Pard had given way before this terrible strain, following his other troubles so closely.

Foolish? If you say so, then you know nothing of the intense love which some men can feel

for a noble horse.

Almost unconsciously a sigh broke from the young man's lips. And following it came the words:

"Poor Tornado! I'd gladly share your pains,

if by so doing I could give you relief!"

Leo hardly knew that he was speaking aloud the thoughts that flashed through his troubled brain, but the sound of his well-known voice caused the black racer to lift his blood-stained muzzle, giving a low, painful whimper of recognition as he turned his glassy eyes toward his loved master.

Coming as it did, when Laughing Leo felt that he was gazing upon one who would never more show recognition, this piteous response proved too much. With a choking gulp he bent and touched the poor head, then turned and rushed out of the stall.

Spread Eagle Sam had to brush his eyes more than once before he could see with sufficient dis-

tinctness to follow after.

He found his partner standing near the gate which led to the plat of ground surrounding the ranch proper. Laughing Leo was outwardly composed, and his voice was cold and steady as he spoke:

"If there is anything that can be done to make him easier, pard, short of killing, will you at-

tend to it?"

"They ain't much that kin be done, but that little don't need the axin', lad," was the gentle response.

"Thanks. I want to keep him alive—over tomorrow, at least. You will find me inside, when

you're through with him."

Cold and ungracious both words and manner seemed, but Spread Eagle Sam did not so regard them. Better than any other man could, he realized what Leo Laughlin was suffering, and what tremendous restraint he was placing upon himself. Little wonder that his manner was unnatural.

Without waiting for a reply, Laughing Leo turned and strode up to the house, entering without giving even a glance toward the curious yet frightened cook and his satellite, who were peeping at their master from around the corner.

Spread Eagle Sam passed over to one of the outbuildings, where he struck a light and rummaged for a short time in an iron-bound box which served him as trunk, wardrobe and treasure-chest all in one. He sifted some finely powdered herbs into a flask of whisky, shaking this vigorously as he closed the box and left the building for the stable.

"They ain't much use, as I see," he muttered, shaking his head dubiously as he stood over the still prostrate racer. "That cussed rattle-weed hes tuck a turrible tight grip o' his in'ards, an' it ain't goin' to let up as long 's thar's life in the pore critter. Ef I only dast do it!"

His free hand dropped mechanically to the long knife in his belt, pointing his words; only to release it again as his shaggy head shook neg-

atively.

"It'd be a marcy to the critter, but pard-he said not! An' what he says is law an' gospel b'iled down to double stren'th, jest now! Anyway, it ain't me that's goin' to cross him-pore boy!"

While muttering thus, Spread Eagle Sam took a home-made drenching tube from where it hung in one corner; part of a steer's horn, the tip having been cut off and the remainder scraped and polished until it was almost transparent and shone like glass.

With gentle firmness he did the rest; forcing open the jaws of the black racer, twisting his head around as he lifted it from the litter, slipping the drenching-horn far down the animal's throat, emptying into it the contents of his flask, then gently pressing on the gullet with a downward stroking motion, to insure the potion's being swallowed.

"It won't do no harm, even ef it don't do no good," he muttered, as he withdrew the horn and gently lowered the head to the litter again. "Anyway, it's what the boss said, an' you ain't the critter to kick ag'inst that, ole feller. He'd heap ruther do harm to his own self then hev it come to you-don't ye know that, Tornado?"

The black racer partly raised its head, uttering a faint whimper as though in assent. And Spread Eagle Sam brushed a hand hastily over his eyes as he stepped back and out of the box stall.

Once outside the stable, he hurled the empty flask far from him. He clinched his huge fists tightly, dashing them one after the other against the stable door, causing the building to re-echo. And a grim, vicious smile showed his teeth through the tangle of blonde beard as he looked at

the plank, split from top to bottom by those blows.

"That's a sample o' how I'll sarve you, when I git two eyes onto ye, ye cussed p'izener o' hosses that's high above ye as them stars is higher'n the deepest pit o' hell!" he grated, nodding his head until his long beard and hair flew about his face in a golden cloud.

That little outburst seemed to make Spread Eagle Sam feel considerably better, for he once more entered the stable for a parting look at the

locoed racer.

Tornado was still lying prostrate, but apparently the potion administered by the giant rancher was beginning to have its intended effect. The creature breathed more naturally. convulsive shivering and cramp-like twitches were less violent than before.

"The lad'll hev his way, I reckon," muttered Sam, but with anything but joy in his tones as he again beat a retreat. "Tornado'll be livin' in the mornin', an' he may pull through ef them cussed fits don't come back too soon an' too cluss after each other. But what good? He'll never be the same critter. An' while he lives, he'll only sarve to keep the sore open an' bleedin' like it bleeds now!"

Spread Eagle spoke from past experience with the dreaded weed which has added at least two expressive words to the Western vocabulary. And yet there is remarkably little known about this curse to the stock-growers of the newer Ter-

ritories, considering its evil effects. For a long time, this was one of the mysteries of ranch life. Without any warning signs, a strange and dangerous epidemic would break out on a ranch, prostrating half or all of the horses thereon. The symptoms were a general emaciation, accompanied with wildly-glaring eyes and unmistakable indications of dementia. Animals so afflicted would rush at a man or other object, with mouth wide open and every appearance of ungovernable frenzy, rearing upon their hind feet and striking out wildly with the fore-legs. And when thus afflicted, two or more horses would fight together, frequently ending only with death.

For a long time no satisfactory cause for this strange disease was discovered. The Spanish term "loco" or crazy, was applied to it, and an animal so affected was said to be "locoed."

At length close and careful observation proved beyond all doubt that feeding upon a certain plant, or weed, was the primary cause. This plant belongs to the order Leguminosæ, of which there are several species, all more or less deleterious in their effects when eaten. Many analyses have been made with the view of ascertaining the active principle possessing such peculiar powers, but with unsatisfactory success thus far.

This plant, as its botanical name implies, belongs to the pea family. It usually has a great many stalks proceeding from a strong rootstalk, and forms a low, bushy plant of a pretty light green. The stalks are branching at the base, and give rise to numerous leaves and stems bearing flowers and seed-pods. The leaflets are of oval form, from one-half to one-quarter of an inch in length, and are of a shining, silvery hue, from being covered with soft, silky hairs. The flower is of a purplish, sometimes yellow color, and has the general appearance of the pea flower. This is succeeded by a pod about an inch in length, very smooth when ripe, and having generally two seeds. One of the most prominent peculiarities of this plant is its hardiness, its delicate green foliage often being seen growing thriftily on the dry and barren plains where but little other vegetation can eke out an existence. It is from this thriftiness and tempting appearance that stock are tempted to feed upon it in the absence of other grasses.

Many attempts have been made at discovering some antidote for the poisonous effects of this weed, but so far unsuccessfully, death generally following its use in a longer or shorter time, according to the amount eaten. In Colorado so great has been the damage done to stock, that a bounty is paid for the destruction of the dangerous growth. It has been proven in that State, however, that when an animal has not indulged too freely in the weed, by removing him at once from the locality and feeding nothing but cultivated grass or hay, the evil effects will in time pass away to a great degree, and the animal may be ridden or worked, though great caution is essential, as it will always be subject to sudden and apparently causeless attacks of mania, resulting in accidents through runaways or otherwise.

This plant is variously known as "loco weed," and "rattle-weed," the last from the peculiar rattling sound made by the seeds in their dry envelope. And an animal which has become diseased by eating it, is said to be "locoed," or "rattled." So common has this latter term become that it passes among the current slang of the day in many localities, as descriptive of those who are deemed in any way non compos.

All of this, and much more, Spread Eagle Sam knew from personal experience, though he had never before met with an instance of the weed growing in that section. Still, it certainly did grow there, for the fragments which he now picked up from where he had flung them in the excitement of his discovery, were still compara-

tively fresh and moist.

"Ef I kin ever ketch the dirty cuss—an' I'll ketch him ef I hev to thump the hull truth out o' every man, woman an' kid they is in the hull durned kentry!-I'll stan' over him an' make him eat a solid ton o' the p'izen stuff! I jes' will, ncw!"

With the poisonous weed crammed into his capacious pocket, Spread Eagle Sam bunted up the frightened cook and his aid, closely questioning them in the vague hopes of obtaining the much coveted clew to the author of that dastardly outrage. But without success. Neither of them had seen any stranger loitering about the premises. True, there were a couple of hours when, having no work to occupy them, they both had taken a snooze—as cook expressed it according to their usual custom. And doubtless it was during this period that the deed was done.

Satisfied that he could effect nothing more that night, Spread Eagle Sam entered the front room where he found Laughing Leo, seated at a rude table, with pen, ink and paper before bim.

"He's restin' some easier, pard," uttered Sam, rightly interpreting the quick glance with which his Dandy Pard greeted him. "I give him a little drench that won't do no harm ef it don't do no good."

"You think he will live through the night,

"I kin make him, ef you want it so," was the slow response, a wistful light in those big blue eyes. "I kin watch over bim, an' keep down the fits by whisky, though the cussed weed 'll be doin' its work on his brain all the same."

"You can tell me how to act, and I'll do the watching." was the calm response, turning and shifting the papers before him until he found the one he was searching for in particular. "Sit down and run your eyes over those figures, pard, please."

Spread Eagle Sam obeyed, though with his troubled air growing more pronounced. He did not like this unnatural coldness. He would greatly prefer a wild outburst of vengeance; at least, that would be more natural, more human than this icy calm.

All at once he gave a great start, turning pale and agitated. What at first looked only a row of unmeaning figures now stood out with painful distinctness. It was a careful and just division of the stock on the Triangle Ranch!

"That's just what I mean, old man," said Laughing Leo, with the ghost of a smile, as he firmly encountered that startled look. "All I want now is your admission that the division is fair and equitable. I wouldn't have left room for the ghost of a doubt, only I knew your stubborn honesty too well to think to cheat you with more than an exact share."

"Say it ag'in, and say it slow, pard," muttered Sam, his breath coming quick and unsteady. "Say jest what you're tryin' to git through ye in tarms plain enough for a thick-head like me

to onderstan'."

"That is not hard," with a short, hard laugh. "I have divided the stock on the place in two equal shares. You are to take one and I'll take the other. We'll shake hands, and each go our own way, good and true friends-but partners no longer.'

"What hev I done to desarve this, pard?" slowly demanded the giant, like one who has to collar and thrust each word out by main force.

"Nothing, old fellow," and Leo reached across to gently pat the strong, muscular hand that was shivering as with an ague. "It is all my doing. I am the Jonah of the Triangle. All our losses and troubles are of my making. And those losses are only just begun-you know that, Sam!"

"What ef I do? Hev you heard me kick ary time?"

"That's just it; you shut your teeth and never make a sign. I'd rather you would kick, and kick hard! It would give me something to fight against here at home-something to keep me from-bah!" and Laughlin flung out one hand with a swift, impatient gesture, tossing his head proudly back as he added: "Let that go. And take your paper, old fellow. In the morning we'll divide the stock, share and share alike."

With a grating oath, Spread Eagle Sam crushed the paper in his hand and flung it across the room. His face was strangely pale, but his blue eyes were fairly ablaze as he leaned across the table and asked:

"Jest one word, Leo Laughlin. Do you think I rattled Tornado?"

Laughing Leo stared with wide-open eyes, the answer written on his face even before his quick speech confirmed it.

"You-loco Tornado? I'd sooner believe my own hand did it!"

Spread Eagle Sam leaned back in his chair, brushing the damp from his white brow, a great breath pouring out of his lungs. A sickly smile stole into his face, and his tones were more

natural when he spoke: That does settle it, then! Nothin'shorter of you thinkin' me a cussed sneak like that kin bu'st up our pardnership. Sink or swim, you an' me is one, pard! We went into the business head-up;

ef we've got to come out tail-down, thar'll be mighty white an' good comp'ny fer each of us! An' what more kin ye ax, pard?"

His great paw shot across the table once more, but it was not accepted as he wished. Instead, Leo Laughlin thrust his own behind his back, shaking his head positively as he slowly uttered:

"Never again as partners, Sam-though it cuts me full as deep as it can you! When all the rest is settled, I'll grip your hand until the tears come, if you wish. As friends always, but never again as pards in the stock business."

"You kin kick, but you cain't kick me out. Pards once, pards ever! Lad!" with a depth of contorted his face until it was absolutely painful to look upon: "Lad, I'd ruther you rammed a knife full len'th in my durned ole heart then to speak like that! What! me'n' you split? Quit bein' pards? Jest fer a little trouble like this? Durned ef I don't begin to think I've got a dose o' loco my own self! I cain't hear straight no mo'!"

"Your ears are not in fault, old friend," said Laughlin, his tones strained but even. "'You feel hurt now, but after a good sleep, you'll be the first to say that I'm only acting as an honest man and friend should act toward one who is loved eben as hard as he can love in turn.

"You must see that I am a marked man. That enemies are at work to ruin me, none the less busily from working under cover."

"We'll rout 'em out from kiver, an then-Double-durn it all!" with a forced grin of indignation on his broad face. "Don't you think I want a bit o' fun? Don't you reckon I'd inj'y thumpin' the everlastin' stuffin' out o' the cussed snakes when they do break kiver?"

"I'm not denying you that pleasure, old friend-but it must be as a friend, not a partner in business, mind ye! I'll not drag you down to ruin with myself—and that's just what things are coming to."

"Ain't I old enough an' ugly enough to tote my sheer? Ever ketch ole Spread Eagle whimperin'? Then that settles it!"

Despite himself, Leo was forced to laugh at this peculiar mode of reasoning. Sam laughed in company, and forced a broad grin, though the uneasy light in his big eyes told how shallow that smile was.

"You spoke of being locoed, Sam," abruptly added Laughing Leo, in turn leaning across the table, speaking sharply, distinctly. "I reckon I'm the one that's got the dose, and to prove it-listen!

"You say Tornado will be alive in the morning. You say that by using whisky the fits can be staved off. All right! You know the bet I made with Basil Brock to day; five hundred head of market steers that I could beat his horse a two-mile dash?

"I'm going to ride that race on Tornado tomorrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE THAN HORNS AND HOOFS AT STAKE.

DESPITE all that had gone before, Spread Eagle Sam could hardly believe the evidence of his own senses, staring with drooping jaw at the cold, hard face of his Dandy Pard as he mechanically echoed the words that so startled him:

"Ride the race—on Tornado!"

Laughing Leo nodded his head slightly as he sunk back in his seat. There was no sign of jesting to be discovered in his pale face, yet-

"It cain't be done, pard, an' you know it!" exploded the giant. "Jest think how the pore critter-but you're tryin' to foolish the ole man -an' me takin' it fer downright gospel!"

A cold smile curled the lips of his partner, and that steely light grew keener and brighter

in his eyes as he retorted:

"Is this a time or matter for jesting? Do I look like a man who would crack a silly joke? I mean just what I say: if Tornado is living when the time set for that race comes around, I'll ride it on his back! If he is dead-I'll skin, stuff and carry him to the score on my own shoulders!"

Wild, incredible as this sounds—as it sounded even then to the ears of the ex-hide-hunter-

Laughing Leo was in deadly earnest. It was with a peculiar reluctance that he had entered into that engagement; he had tried by every honorable means to avoid the match, yielding only to pressure which he could not evade without actually laying himself open to the charge of cowardice; but enter into it he had, and this peculiar reluctance but rendered the blow a heavier one now it had fallen after such a dastardly fashion.

And there were other influences at work. none of which were calculated to steady his brain in such an emergency. Those past months had not been without their effect on the young rancher, though until now, he had given no

outward sign. Involuntarily Spread Eagle Sam pushed his seat a little further from the table, drawing his long limbs under his body, ready for swift and keen though I know your eyes are when a friend

he was scarce conscious of doing this, he felt that his Dandy Pard was "growing flighty" and half-looked for him to break out into a fit of frenzy something akin to that in which they had found poor Tornado.

"Locoed—that's what!" dropped from his lips in husky accents. "Plum' crazy, or I'm a -pard!" with a sudden fear that closed upon his heart like a grip of ice. "You didn't tetch it -you didn't take a dose o' that p'izened water back thar?"

The look of sickened horror that spread over his face as he gave panting utterance to this frightful dread, served well its part. Laughing emotion that almost suffocated his words, that Leo was deeply touched by it, and their hands joined in a tight grip over the table, a more natural look coming into the eyes of the younger man as he spoke again:

"Not a drop touched my lips, old pard, though I don't know but it would have been money in my pocket if that angel-a little offcolor, maybe, but still an angel, Sam-had waited around the corner a few minutes longer. You'd have got even for it, somehow, and—"

gittin' even, pard?" interposed the giant, with a vicious click of his strong teeth.

There was no immediate response. Laughing Leo released his hand, resting both elbows on the table, his temples pressed tightly between his palms as his eyes stared unseeingly at the papers which he had been looking over when Spread Eagle Sam came into the room.

The giant watched him furtively, that dread fear not yet killed in his heart. This was so unlike the usual manner of his Dandy Pard, whose spirits seemed strangers to depression, whose bright face and gay laugh had made the ranch more of a home than Sam had ever known before.

True, the poisoning of Tornado was enough to knock any man off his balance, but there was something beyond sorrow and rage in this conduct. There was something below the surface which, as yet, he could not even give a guess at.

Spread Eagle Sam stood this suspense until it grew unbearable, then reached across the table and touched Laughing Leo on the arm.

"Pard, shell I take an' chaw up the rest o' this durned truck fer my own supper?" he said, pulling the broken and bruised stems of loco weed out of his pocket, dropping them on the table. "Ef you don't, then come out o' that spell an' let me see ye my ole pard ag'in! Mebbe I'm a durned ole fool fer feelin' so, but ef this goes on my own self!"

Not precisely what he wished to say, but it was enough, added to the quivering of his strong hand and the piteous appealing look in his great pop-eyes. Laughing Leo noted both, and that icy, unnatural calm was broken.

True, it was but the ghost of his old gay laugh that bubbled forth as he caught that trembling hand—a hand that fear of fee could never shake as love was shivering it now! But there was something more natural in both smile and voice as he spoke again:

"You refused to take warning and the freedom I offered you, old fellow, so at least a portion of the blame belongs to yourself. As a pard, you feel in duty bound to share my troubles; as a stranger-I'll not say it, even in jest, Sam. You and I will never be anything but pards while there's life and breath in our bodies. And yet-"

"When ye come to a good stoppin' place, stop!" interposed the big rancher, smiling through the tears that had come into his eyes despite his rapid winking. "Pards we be, an' pards we stay. They ain't no other way. An' so let it camp down right thar!'

"If you will have it so, old fellow," with a faint smile. "Surely I ought to be willing. You give everything, and get— Sam, if you've got a single grain of common sense left in your a bit ago; you'll accept a division of the stock, shake hands and say good-by pard!"

"I'd ruther be called a durn fool, ef you don't mind, lad."

Sam laughed as he spoke, but that assumed mirth could not cover over the strong emotion that lay under the words. Then, if never before, Laughing Leo must have seen how deeply, wholly he was loved by his big pard.

"I'll never call you that, Sam, whatever I may think, but others will when they see where I am leading you."

"The same mouth won't say it twice, any-

how."

"That is just why I want to divide, old fellow," with an increase of gravity in voice and face. "I know your hot temper. I know that you won't stand crowding. I know that when you do bite you make your teeth meet in the flesh, and only loose your grip when the mouthful comes out with it. But the whole country is against you, and no two men can fight the lot with any hope of success."

"Ef two men cain't, how kin one?"

"That one, if you mean me, don't expect to come out on top," was the quiet response. "See here, pard, there's more in this than vou suspect. decisive action at a moment's warning. Though 'is in trouble. You know how hard I took the

poisoning of poor Tornado, but it was not all because I value him so highly, though I'd give my left hand to put him back where he was only this morning."

"Then thar's somethin' more than hoofs an' horns in this bet? Be durned ef I didn't think it fus't off," ejaculated Spread Eagle, bringing his clinched fist down on the table with a mighty thump.

The face of Laughing Leo turned a shade paler, and that strangely troubled light returned to his eyes. For a brief space he averted his head, but then faced his big pard fully, speaking coldly, earnestly:

"You're right-there's much more in it than horns and hoofs. I thought I'd never trouble you with the story, old fellow, but I know you'll be better content if you see the whole affair just as I do."

"I'm willin' to take it all on trust, pard," was the swift interposition, as Spread Eagle gently touched the hand of his friend. "I've knowed you long enough fer that. When I like a body I like him all over an' clean through. Don't say "What's the matter with all two both on us another word ef it cuts too deep. I'd ruther not hear it, pard."

Laughing Leo smiled faintly as he looked at

the speaker.

"Every word you utter is but piling on top another reason for my making a clean breast of it, old fellow. My mind is fully made up. You might as well make up yours to listen to a long and—worse luck—mighty disagreeable revelation!

"You know all we have gone through of late months; you know what dastardly blows have been dealt at us by enemies from under cover; so I'll not run over them now. I'll simply explain why they have fallen, as I have reasoned it out in my own mind.

"But, first, I want your solemn pledge not to take a step toward getting even without first consulting with me. You'll give it, Sam?"

The big rancher hesitated, but it was only long enough for a single keen glance into the eyes of his Dandy Pard. Then his huge hand was stretched across the table, and he replied:

"Thar you hev it, pard. I ain't afeard to go it blind when you ax it of me-no I ain't, honey!"

Their hands closed in a warm grip, then Laughing Leo resumed:

"You know considerable of my rast life, Sam, though it has never been a subject of conversation between us. You know that my trail much longer, I'll bu'st a flue or go plum crazy has had more than one ugly crook in it, though I've tried to make it open and straight ever since you and I crossed palms."

> "Straight as a string an' true as a die, pard!" muttered Spread Eagle, earnestly. "The past is past; why fetch it up now?"

> "To show you why I find myself in such an ugly box to-night, old fellow," was the grave response. "Don't think it a pleasure to me. I'd give my right hand if I could blot out the past. But it is there, and no regrets of mine can alter it one iota.

> "You was the close friend of old Kirkendall, Sam, and so you must have known of the part my mother played in his life. I'm not upholding the course she took. She never showed much mother-love for me. She cast me off to hunt for myself when I was but a child, else I might have grown up a different sort of man. But still—she was my mother, and it comes hard to say what I must say to-night.

> "You know that she cherished a deadly hatred for Morris Kirkendall to the very last. You know the plot she formed against him, and in which I consented to take a part. You know how that plot failed, and how I made what amends I could."

> "I know you acted clean white, an' nobody'll stick to that harder than little Beauty-bird her own self!" interposed Spread Eagle.

"God bless her!" fervently muttered Laughcomposition, you'll take me at the offer I made | ing Leo, involuntarily glancing upward as the prayer fell from his lips; for prayer it was. "If I'm a better man now, it is she who deserves the thanks. When I learned to love Luada Kirkendall, I began to see how evil my life had been. But let that go. I lost her-a better man won and wears her."

Spread Eagle Sam shook his head as though he could not subscribe to this, but he contented himself with an inarticulate growl.

"Among the party my mother led on that expedition, was a man who had once been an officer in the regular army. He passed by the name of Major John Westgate, I believe: Major Jack he was more generally called. Then, I knew little or nothing about him, nor did I seek to learn more at the time. I saw but little of him, and simply thought of him, when I took even so much trouble, as being one of the lawless gang who followed my mother's lead. What I am about to tell you, I learned afterward.

"This man's real name was Wesley Kimball, and he had been a major, as he still called himself. Drinking, gambling, and in the end a heavy forgery led to his being cashiered and dismissed from the service in disgrace. Then be rapidly went to the bad, until he finally met my mother, and fell a victim to her charms-

you have seen her, Sam!" Spread Eagle nodded assent. The beautiful

face of the "She Wolf" rose before his mind's eye, and even now he could hardly realize that, herself looking scarcely as old, even then she had a son full five-and-thirty years of age.

"This Kimball," rapidly resumed Laughing Leo, "was a man with a wife and family when he was turned out of the army. He deserted them then, even as he had neglected them for years before. Still, he had a wife and family, for neither applied for a divorce,

up to that time.

"You know when my mother captured Luada and Purchass, when they were eloping together. You know I saw them go, and made no effort to hinder them, knowing right well the cunning trap into which they were running their heads. You know where they were taken—to the cave, where, afterward, my mother met her death by her own hand, exulting in the belief that I was carrying out the bitter revenge she had sworn.

"But there is one thing you never learned: that is how my mother stabbed Wesley Kimball to the heart for daring to protect Luada Kirkendall from her savage fury. Remember: he died by her hand, and she was my mother!"

His voice grown husky and unsteady, Laughing Leo ceased speaking and partly averted his ghastly pale face. Spread Eagle Sam said nothing, though honest sympathy beamed forth from every feature. As yet he failed to catch the real drift of this recital, though he could see it was bitter as death to the lips that gave it shape.

Leo Laughlin quickly regained his self-com-

mand, and resumed;

"Wesley Kimball's wife, when she could learn nothing more of him, though years had passed since his dismissal from the army, finally applied for and secured a divorce. Although she knew it not at the time, death had divorced her nearly a month before that application was made.

"She resumed her maiden name, and her children took the same; at least her eldest, a son, did so. And to-day he is known as Basil

Brock!"

Spread Eagle Sam leaped to his feet with a sounding oath, his big eyes filling with a light of comprehension.

"That does settle it! He's the snake-in-thegrass that's bin bitin' our heels all this time." "I've known it for months, old fellow," quietly uttered Laughing Leo, just the ghost of a smile flitting across his handsome face.

"Knowed it-you? Knowed it-an' never let on by word or look to me nur nobody else?" exploded the giant, staring as though unable to believe the evidence of his own senses. "Knowed it—an' let the cussed whelp go on an' on, an' never once shet your grip onto him? Pard, be durned ef I don't think you're lyin' to me-I jes' do !"

"It was hard," slowly responded Leo, grave enough now. "It was hard, but mainly because

you were a joint sufferer with me." "Why not, bein' as we was, an' is, an' ever

will be, pardners?"

"But when I knew that his father died by the hand of my own mother, what was I to do?"

"Lick the stuffin' out o' that daddy's sonwhy not?" boldly retorted Spread Eagle, though a change of color told how nearly he guessed the motive that had held his Dandy Pard in check. "It wasn't you that got his pap turned out o' the army, was it? You didn't ram him chuck full o' benzine, nur make him gamble, nur yit write the name of a better man to a bit o' paper, did ye? No! Then what's the use lookin' back so fur, an' through sech smoky spectacles? The deviltry was did long afore you knowed the critter. What ef he did die; your han' never tetched him, did it?"

"My mother killed him. His son knows it. My mother is dead and beyond his reach, but her son lives. If I was in his shoes, I'd try to even up old scores as best I could—and so would

you, pard!"

"But not by pi'zenin' hosses - not by Laughing Leo. chuckin' rattle-weed to a hoss ag'inst which I'd bet a herd o' cattle!" with angry scorn.

"All men are not like you—worse luck!" with a faint smile that died in its birth. "Basil Brock takes his own way. And you must remember that he has tried often enough to provoke me into fighting him. Do him so much justice, at any rate."

"An' beca'se he was his daddy's son, you wouldn't fight him? That is why you've tuck so much more'n I ever thought to see you take,

knowin' you so well, knowin' that ef you liked, you could take an' double him over your knee like a babby? All right," with a sharp nod of his shaggy head, his big eyes fairly blazing. "They ain't nothin' holdin' my han's. I've lost the same as you've lost, up to pore Tornado. An' I'll ax Mister Basil Brock to step up to the cap'n's office to settle old a'counts, sure as he comes to the meetin' to-morrow!"

"Not against your promise, pard," with a short laugh. "You've passed your word, and

I know you'll never break that." "Then you'll take the sprout in han'? You

won't let him go now, after locoin' Tornado?" "I am not sure he did loco him," slowly. "J. hope I'll never know that for sure. If I didlet that pass. I don't want to even think of it.

The temptations have tried me too strong

already!"

"There is still more back, Sam," he added, in his former cold, even tones. "Basil Brock hates me as the son of the woman who killed his father, but I believe he hates me still more for something else. You know how crazy-mad in love with Miss McAvoy the fellow is? Well, to this older hatred is added jealousy."

"But the durn fool ham't got no cause fer that, pard? Surely you ain't goin' to hitch up with that gal?" and as he spoke Spread Eagle Sam fairly held his breath with apprehension. Laughing Leo shook his head negatively.

"Don't think it, old fellow. I've loved once -you know that. If I ever love again, it will be a woman different from Miss McAvoy as

night is from day."

"I might 'a' knowed it, an yit—pard, more'n once o' late days that fear hes tuck me mighty nigh whar I lived! I cannot jest say why, but somehow it's looked to me as though you was gittin' hit hard by a petticut o' some sort! An' that's why it paralyzed me when you said us two was to quit pardin' right off! A wife, says I to myself!"

What caused that soft flush to steal into the handsome face of the young rancher? What made his thoughts turn to the Indian girl at the poisoned spring? Surely he was not falling in love—and with a girl of Indian blood?

"I'm a mighty glad to hear it, though!" added Spread Eagle, frowning darkly. "Mebbe I'ma fool: mebbe I'm 'way off in my thinkin', but fer the life o' me I cain't make it come even that yender wild Irishman an' his gal is jest as squar' as a die! Be durned ef I wouldn't like to take easy odds that they're both on 'em mixed up with the gang that's doin' all o' this hoss an' stock stealin'!"

Laughing Leo shook his head. He could not go that far, though he had no particular love for Finn McAvoy. Nor, for that matter, did he wholly admire Queen Sate. She was admirable company, but as a woman-and once more, the dusky, yet fair face of Meta-lupa rose before him.

With an impatient toss of his head he banished

that vision.

"You know how long I've steered clear of coming into actual rivalry with Basil Brock, pard. You know how hard he rubbed me every day since this round-up began. And then-well I couldn't take such a rude bluff before Queen Sate, and the match was made."

"An' all the time the durned cur was ready to

loco Tornado!"

"We neither of us know that for certain, Sam," with forced calmness. "If I did-let it pass, I say!" with sudden anger.

Spread Eagle subsided once more, and Laugh-

ing Leo added:

"I made the bet, and though no particular horses were named, of course everybody took it for granted that his bay and my black were to run for the horns. I meant it so, and if Tornado is living at the hour set, I'll ride him for the herd!"

"That would be his death, sure, pard!"

"You said that he would choose death rather than live on a cripple, subject to those frightful spells. How could be die better than in saving the honor of his master?"

Sam looked very grave, but he said nothing. He knew that words of his would be of no avail,

while Laughlin was in this mood.

"This resolve is one reason why I wanted to dissolve partnership with you, old fellow. While I have a right to risk my property after my own fashion, I have no right to throw away yours. So, since you refuse to dissolve, I'll take this bet on my own shoulders. I've got enough to pay my losses and leave a neat lump for the locoing demon to take another whack at!"

"Pards in one thing, pards in all," doggedly muttered Sam.

"Not in this mad wager," firmly retorted

Spread Eagle Sam leaned over the table and gazed steadily into those glowing eyes. Firmly his own were met, and as he saw no signs of yielding there, the giant rancher abruptly rose to his feet, stripping the belt of arms from

which he picked up and set in one corner. Returning, he gravely disarmed his Dandy Pard after the same fashion, not a muscle of his hard-set face altering under the wondering gaze

around his waist and laying it on the table,

of the younger member of the firm. "What's got into you, old man? Surely you've not been drinking?" ejaculated Leo, as Spread Eagle motioned him to rise to his feet.

Never a word in reply, as the giant carried both chairs over to the corner where he had placed the table, thus leaving the center of the room perfectly clear. Never a word as he strode back and confronted the astonished man, rolling up his sleeves to the elbow. Then-

"Strip an' put up your paws pard. I'm goin' to lick sense into you, or hev the sense licked out o'my own self. I'm goin' to hev my sheer in that bet, or a hole in the ground—that's swore

to!" Laughing Leo gazed keenly into his honest face, but he saw nothing save dogged resolution there. And with a sudden dimming of his eyes,

he extended his open hand, which Sam caught with a sob that was a curious mixture of joy, love and intense relief.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEREIN CICERO GROWETH INQUISITIVE. "Don't care if I do, since it is you, Miss: McAvoy," bowed Cicero Boggs, passing his glass, with a low bow, a sudden smile filling his face, and a merry laugh parting his lips. "'Pon my word, ma'am, I never passed a more thoroughly agreeable evening since my memory began! And-now you wouldn't believe it, but actually when I set out on this important mission, I labored under the delusion that I wasbound for the most God-forsaken region imaginable! That if I ever happened to run across anything milder than wild beasts and lawless desperadoes, it could only be some native bellecopper belle, you know!-whose charms consisted mainly of a chew of tobacco and an army blanket! Perfectly ridiculous, wasn't it,. ma'am?"

"Precisely what I would have expected-of

Mr. Cicero Boggs."

"Eh?" and it was wonderful how quickly that jolly laugh died out, leaving only the most shadowy of smiles behind. "Is that another of your-your delightful jokes, Miss McAvoy? You see they're not quite—not just as penetrating as they would be but for this deliciously strong punch, ma'am! Or-that don't sound precisely as I meant it should, either," with a dubious shake of the head and a half-nervous: look into that beautiful face. "Really, ma'am. that ugly tumble I got to-day must have jumbled my poor brain all up! I know there was a good pun somewhere when I began: something untangled from strong punch, my head and penetrating; but—beg your pardon."

"You do me entirely too much honor, Mr. Cicero Boggs," Queen Sate uttered, her lips: curling as she leaned back in her chair and gazed at the gentleman from Minneapolis through her half-closed lids. "I was never guilty of attempting a jest in all my life. I am far toostupid to make or appreciate a pun, though I. shudder as I realize the unfathomable depth to which I must fall in your estimation as I make the admission. But truth is my guiding star, and truth compels me to add-too abominably

Cicero Boggs abruptly replaced his emptied glass on the table, leaning forward and gazing steadily into the face of his fair hostess. Queen Sate met his gaze without flinching, yet without changing her indolent, careless attitude or look.

diaphanous, Wirt Dalton, Esquire!"

"Then you wasn't jesting? You actually mistook me for some mysterious personage-a

detective, and all that?"

"No, I didn't," with a low, purring laugh. "Not a bit of a mistake about it, my dear fellow. I know you are a detective!"

Cicero Boggs smiled the ghost of a smile, his brows arching, one hand rubbing his chin as he feebly ventured: "If you say so, of course it must be correct,

but-you couldn't tell me just who I'm to draw-

against for my salary, ma'am?"

"It's hardly worth while, unless there is back pay due you. Still, if you care to have me, and will jot down the proper names and address: of your legal heirs, I'll take pleasure in letting them know the precise manner and hour of your discharge. Or are you hired to hunt men to the gallows by the month, or year?"

"Is it a conundrum, ma'am?" feebly gasped Cicero Boggs, the personification of utter help-

lessness.

Queen Sate cast off all pretense, her eyes glowing vividly, her face flushed, her voice sharp and decisive as she leaned across the table, speak-

ing rapidly:

"It is cold truth, Wirt Dalton, as you know without repetition. You rlay the part you have assumed by way of a blind to your real character, but not well enough to make me forget what my own eyes saw and my own ears heard. I know you. I know what has brought you tothese parts. Even better than you can, bloodhound though you are by trade and nature, I realize the peril you are encountering by cominghere in disguise. And, once for all, I warn you to get out of this section with the least possibleloss of time, unless you are yearning for a bloody grave!"

"A detective—I, a detective!" muttered Cicero Boggs, like one whose vocal organs are working of their own accord without stopping for orders from headquarters. "And-she don't

look like she was joking, but-eh?"

Queen Sate frowned, striking her little fist sharply on the polished table before her, the action causing her guest to start in his seat and rally his scattered wits.

"You idiot!" was the not very complimentary title that sprung from those red lips. "Have I not yet convinced you your flimsy mask is no proof against my memory for names and faces? Listen, then:

"This spring I paid a visit to Chicago. Among other objects of interest to country sight-seers, there was a celebrated criminal being tried for his life. Possibly you, as a lawyer's clerk, may have heard of this before," with a macking noch and undisguised smeer.

"Shop, my dear Miss McAvoy, has but slight attractions for men of our profession, unless we are actively engaged in the case, you know."

"And you were in this case," was the swift retort. "You were one of the principal witnesses against the poor devil in the dock. It was mainly by your evidence that he was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he was dead-and all the rest of the legal rigmarole."

"Indeed, ma'am-"

that I am lying, when I swear you are the same person who was pointed out to me then as the notorious-or was it famous?-detective,

Wirt Dalton?"

"Changed—decidedly I must have been changed, and never even suspected the atrocious deed until this very instant!" murmured C cero Boggs, with a doleful shake of the head. "Eh? Lie? I'd bite my own tongue off first, ma'am!"

"Then you admit that you are the detective, Wirt Dalton?"

"If you affirm it, ma'am," with increasing meekness. Queen Sate gazed at the man intently for a

few moments, then broke into a laugh, as she added:

"Let it go at that, then! I know you are the detective I saw in Chicago. I know you are no more a lawyer's clerk than I am an angel. And knowing this, I can readily guess why you are in this part of the country: playing the role of bloodhound, on the scent of some criminal.

"For the life of me I can't imagine why I am taking so much trouble on your account. Certainly I have no particular love for men in your profession; it is too devilishly calculating, too mercilessly cruel, necessary though it may be, to win either the sympathy or the admiration of a woman who has a heart or conscience remaining unseared. And yet-you have broken bread beneath our roof!"

"Remarkably good bread, too!" murmured

Cicero Boggs.

"Let the reasons go hang!" impatiently added Queen Sate, her face growing harder, sterner than before. "I am not the only one in this section who has been to Chicago. There are many eyes as keen and memories as clear as mine. You were pointed out to me as one of the celebrated characters of the great city, and you may have been pointed out to others in the same manner.

you play the part you have assumed almost to perfection; but I penetrated both, almost at the first glance. What I have done, still others may do; but the result will hardly be the same. You

can appreciate that, Wirt Dalton!"

"It wouldn't be any use to gently insinuate that your beautiful eyes were leading you astray, ma'am?" meekly ventured Cicero Boggs.

"Though you were to deny your identity from this until broad daylight, it wouldn't change my

belief one iota!"

"Then, I must be this—this bloodhound! Wonder what Maggie will say? A bloodhound for a husband! And the little ones—good Lord!"

Cicero Boggs broke down with a gasping

groan. It was too much!

"If you are really a man of family, so much the more reason for your acting on my advice," interpose Queen Sate, deep earnestness in both face and tones. "It would be worse than folly for you to attempt flight to-night; if seen by any person at odds with the law-and there is no lack of such men in these parts, worse luck!that would all the more surely arouse ugly suspicions. And to be suspected by such men is to be put out of the way in the shortest manner."

"But if there is no ground for suspicion?" ven-

tured Boggs.

"Don't bring that up again, I beg of you!" with an impatient frown. "You are Wirt Dalton. You have admitted as much in looks, if not words."

"And Maggie's the wife of a-ugh!"

"In the morning you can take your horse-or if has too lame for good service on the road, I'll see that you have another mount. You will lose no time in getting out of this part of the country. I'll wish you good-speed, and send you fairly on your way. After that-well, if you dron by the wayside, my hands and conscience will be clear, at all events."

A sull len and complete change came over the man as Queen Sate finished speaking. He seemed more a man of business, and his feeble flip-

panry had all vanished.

"Although you are greatly mistaken in your guess, Miss McAvoy, I am just as grateful for your kindness. I am just what I claimed to be. when we first met. I am looking for Melchoir Parkindale, or such heirs as he may have left behind him in case he is dead. Still, since the resemblance between this Wirt Dalton and myself must be remarkably strong to so thoroughly deceive vour eyes, I'd be a fool not to keep on my guard against others making the same mistake. And after the race-meeting to-morrow, I'll act on your advice and make tracks for home and safety!"

Through this rapid speech, Queen Sate sat in silence, keenly watching the speaker as if expecting to catch him tripping. But if so she was disappointed. And a dark frown came into her face at the last sentence, for it told her that she had spent her breath in vain.

"If you attend that meeting, the odds are that you'll never make the return trip! The whole neighborhood will be in attendance, and among so many you can hardly hope to escape recognition as Wirt Dalton, the detective."

"But what else can I do, ma'am!" with an ap-"Do you dare deny it? Dare you even hint pealing look. "You don't know the house, ma'am, or you'd see that in fleeing from a possible peril, I'd be running right up against a positive one. Ugh!" with a nervous shrug and shiver. "Think if the firm should ever find out! Think if it should come to their ears that I, their confidential clerk and chosen embassador, had run away from the task assigned him, just as there was a fine prospect of gaining some information by which this long-missing Melchoir Parkindale might be found—and thus add a rare lump to the bank account of said firm! Just think of it—for I'm blessed if I want to!"

"So be it, then!" and Queen Sate refilled her legs-who knows?" glass from the generous bowl. "We'll drop a vail over the past hour, and I agree to forget that I ever saw or heard of Wirt Dalton, if you agree to forgive my impertinence in trying to save a man who wouldn't be saved! Is it a bar-

gain, Mr. Boggs?"

"If I may first thank you for-"

"Having failed, no thanks are due," was the quick interposition as Queen Sate laughingly declined the hand that was thrust across the table to shake hers. "Your good health, Mr. Boggs."

Thus Finn McAvoy found them when he returned, and had the wishes of that giant alone been consulted, thus the dawning of a new day would have found himself and guest. But Queen Sate asserted her rights as hostess, reminding them that a busy day awaited them all, and an hour later found Cicero Boggsin an upper cham-

Not preparing for bed, though a very comfortable looking one was wholly at his service. Instead, he stood in the middle of the room, his head bowed, his hands clasped behind him, his face grave and hard as though his reflections were not of the brightest or most agreeable.

For minute after minute he stood thus, motionless as though suddenly turned to stone. Until a

sound from below startled him.

He glanced rapidly around the room, taking in its contents, noting the bed, wash-stand, chair, "Your disguise is good enough, perhaps, and and the one window without curtain or shade."

He blew out the light, then moved noiselessly to the window, standing to one side and a little back as though fearing to expose himself. Just why he observed this caution, might have puzzled himself to explain, but before many minutes passed he found cause for congratulating himself on observing it

The chamber to which he had been assigned was located in one end of the ranch, and thanks to the light of the nearly full moon, now well above the horizon, he was given a pretty extensive view. Yet, after the first searching look over this wide prospect, Cicero Boggs confined his watching to a much narrower compass.

To be rewarded at last by catching sight of a figure moving silently along only a few yards from the base of the building—the figure of a woman—and that woman none other than Queen Sate, who was looking up at his window.

A barely audible laugh came bubbling up in the throat of Cicero Boggs as he recognized the queenly figure below. Possibly he fancied that, despite his having declared himself a married man, with an interesting family of little olivebranches growing up about their mother's knee, this queenly Belle of the Range had fallen romautically in love with him-for surely nothing but romance of the most sentimental type could lure Queen Sate out to gaze up at his window.

If so, the cool night air quickly wroght a cure, for the next moment Queen Sate turned aud

vanished from whence she came.

Cicero Boggs, a curious smile upon his face, silently brought a chair to the window, sitting down and composing himself as though for a long vigil. Not a word escaped his lips. Only that smile.

For full two hours he sat thus in waiting, his keen eyes roving here and there over the plain, broken here and there by a clump of trees or shrubbery. Then-he gave a start and drew in a long breath as he caught sight of what seemed a bright star—but a star that seemed to rest on the ground for a short space, then to spring into life and motion, turning and wheeling, performing eccentric circles and figures in the air, yet never rising much above the level of a human head.

"A signal!" muttered Cicero Boggs, nodding his head with the air of one who had been expecting something of the sort, sooner or later. "Dollars to cents I can name the one that will

answer it." If he did so, it was mentally, for not another word passed his lips as he waited and watched, even after the bright star vanished from view into one of the clumps of trees, as he could now see. At least, the star had gone through its eccentric performance just on the edge of them.

It was nearly half an hour later that Cicero Boggs caught sight of a human figure moving away from the ranch and in the direction of that vanished signal. Then something like an oath broke hissingly from his lips, and the moonlight showed both astonishment and disappointment imprinted upon his face.

"A man-not her! I could have sworn she would be the one to answer that signal. If not, why was she looking to see if my light was put

out? If not-why not?"

A low, barely audible laugh came from his lips as he carefully, noiselessly tried the window. It was secured only by a simple catch at one side, and rose under his pressure without a sound. He let it rest at the top catch, turning to the bed, after a single keen glance from the sill to the ground.

"A drop down wouldn't hurt, but how about dropping up again?" he muttered, as he opened his saddle-bags, which he had brought to the chamber with him, slipping therefrom a brace of business-like revolvers, together with a cartridge-belt. "That's an after consideration, anyhow. Maybe I'll come back on other bodies'

Buckling the belt around his waist, Cicero Boggs returned to the window, gazing intently across the moonlighted space. He soon caught sight of that figure, almost at the clump of trees before which the star-signal had been displayed.

"It's risky, but I reckon I can make the riffle! I could dispense with a little of that light," glancing up at the moon as it sailed in a cloudless sky, "but beggars mustn't be choosers, and I'll get there, all the same!"

He saw the dark figure fade from view, and without waiting longer he slipped through the opening, feet foremost, hanging to the sill by his hands for a moment to steady himself, then drop-

ping to the ground.

He made scarcely more noise than a cat would in performing the same feat, but crouching low against the building he held his breath and listened intently. Not a sound came to his ears in token that his movements had attracted attention, and creeping along the building until at the corner from whence his movements could be seen from the least number of windows, he made off at good speed.

Not in a direct line for the clump of trees where his curiosity was centered. Tenderfoot though he might be, Cicero Boggs was far too wise or prudent for that. He veered to the left, putting a second patch of timber between himself and the one from which the signal had been

displayed.

Satisfied now that he was in no danger of being seen, Cicero Boggs ran swiftly along until his chosen cover was reached. Closely skirting this, he gazed eagerly across to the other timber, now only a short quarter of a mile distant.

A vivid light flashed in his eyes as he shortly distinguished several figures on the further side of the cover, moving slowly on as though to gain

the main body of timber beyond.

"I may be too late, but I don't think it," he muttered, crouching low down and moving rapidly onward. "Those may be only the cnes who signaled the ranch, and I may run heads square with the fellow who answered them, coming back; but I don't think it. So here she goes!"

Keeping an eye on the retreating figures until they vanished in the timber, Cicero Boggs stole on, skirting the clump of trees instead of passing through it, so satisfied was he that his game had

passed on with the others.

It was a risky business when once clear of cover, forced to move across a level stretch where there was nothing to cover him, while the clear light of the moon made all objects as visible as day in the open. Very inquisitive indeed must this lawyer's clerk be, to run such reril; very curious or very foolhardy; but Cicero Boggs never hesitated.

Fortune seemed inclined to favor him, for he succeeding in reaching the line of undergrowth bordering the heavier timber without having a challenge or a shot hurled at him from those he was trying to spy upon. And as he noiselessly wormed his way through the brush, lying flat on his stomach and looking like some curiously deformed lizard, his keen ears caught the faint, humming sound of human voices in busy conversation, apparently at no great distance from his location.

He listened intently. He could not distinguish either voice or words, but he could give a tolerably accurate guess as to the distance which separated himself and the strangers, and thus guided he lost little time in reaching a position where he could hear if he could not see what was going on.

Something of surprise was mingled with the half-defiant, half-mocking light that glowed in his eyes as he caught the clear voice of the first

speaker:

"There's no possible chance for a mistake, I tell you! I knew the bloodhound the instant I clapped my two eyes on his face. He is a demon on the trail, so report has it, and never lets up his grip until at the foot of the scaffold!"

"If you say so-" "I do say so, most emphatically. I say that the entire company is in danger while that man draws the air of this region into his lungs. I say

that he is one of the deadliest bloodhounds the law ever put on the track of better men. And in giving you this warning, my responsibility is at an end."

"He'll never go back to tell what he's diskivered," came a growling voice. "Say the word an' I'll call on him in his own room. They ain't nothin' I take more fun in then slittin' the wizzen o' jest sech breed o' dogs as them!"

Pleasant, surely, for an eavesdropper! But Cicero Boggs neither fainted with terror nor l tried to escape by flight. Instead he listened, listened all the more closely to the words of the next speaker; to the same voice that had, earlier in the night, warned him of danger—the voice of Queen Sate herself!

"Not that, Johnson. I'll have no blood shed so near home. Take word to the chief, warning him that there is mischief brewing; tell him I say so. The rest of you keep an eye on the fellow, and see that he has no chance for making trouble right here. I'll point him out to you at the race meeting to-morrow."

in yet another voice. "I'll engage to spot a detective by scent at first glance!"

A low, musical laugh followed this speech, and the voice of Queen Sate made response:

"Not in this case, dear boy! You'll open your eyes to their widest extent when I point out my gentle bloodhound, for of all the green tenderfeet, he looks the greenest! And carries out his part nearly to perfection, too! If I hadn't marked his face in Chicago, feeling that the time would come, sooner or later, when he would be trying his tricks in this section, I'd never have spotted-"

That was the last word Cicero Boggs distinguished.

There was not the faintest sound to warn him of impending danger, and the first intimation he received was also the last.

A heavy weight fell fairly upon his back, and a crushing blow descended full upon his head, instantly depriving him of consciousness if not of life as well.

CHAPTER X.

OLD JOHN'S FAMILY CIRCLE.

RED-FOOT left the B. B. Ranch on foot, but he had no intention of completing his journey after the same fashion. Indian vagabond though he seemed to the majority, he was not so poor as to be without a horse, though he had intercepted | but it was more by force of habit than from any Basil Brock so far from the ranch without that comfortable aid.

Ten minutes after parting with the young rancher, he was mounted and riding away through the moonlight, hugging his precious bundle of finery to his ragged bosom, now and then breaking into a laugh that was in strong contrast to the traditional stoicism of his peo-

"For a squaw—yes!" he laughed, tossing his bare head with malicious glee, mingled with contempt. "How his eyes flashed and his lips curled with angry scorn as he asked me that! Did I expect him to hunt me up a squaw? Ha! ha! Red-foot Injun, but he ketch own squawugh!"

Lucky for Red-foot that Basil Brock was too far away to catch that mocking tone, to note the malicious sneer that filled both voice and face. Lucky for the young rancher, after another fashion; his dreams that night might not have been quite so full of exultation!

Red-foot was a true Indian in his style of riding, at least, and spared neither quirt nor spur when once in the saddle. Over the level plain, up slope and down incline he pressed at full speed, the reins hanging loose, one hand clutching fast to his bundle of gay clothes, the other gripping the short, cruel whip, a vicious lash from which rewarded each partial stumble or sign of falling off in speed.

More than once he cast a glance in the direction of the Triangle Ranch, the light of the full moon showing a grin on his bronzed face as though he found something particularly pleasing in his relation to the new firm and its belongings. Yet his course did not once carry him within eyesight of the ranch itself, leaving it to the right as he dashed on toward the broken country above.

It was a long ride—full half-a-day's journey for a civilized rider—but Red-foot never drew rein from one end to the other, and only once or twice permitted his panting horse to drop into a walk in order to catch its breath, until the comparatively level ground was left behind him, and he entered a narrow, rock-strewn valley, where even an Indian horseman must be hard pressed before he would attempt to traverse it at speed, in the night.

Though the moon was now quite high up in the clear heavens, the side walls of the valleyalmost a canyon in depth and narrowness-cut off its direct rays as yet, and the trail which Red-

foot followed was in deep shadow. That this was no fresh trail to his panting steed, was sufficiently clear from the ease with which the creature picked its way, showing neither doubt or irresolution, though its master never troubled to touch the reins. Nor did Red-foot make any objections as the panting

animal turned abruptly into a narrow opening to the left, coming to a halt when a few rods away from the main valley. Instead, the red-skin vagabond sprung lightly to the ground, carefully depositing his precious bundle on a dry bowlder while he stripped his sweat-dripping steed of its equipage. He turned the horse loose, then hid the furniture in a snug retreat part way up the steep bank, stepping with caution from stone to stone, making never a misstep even in the gloom.

Leaving the horse to care for itself, Red-foot descended and took up his package, tucking it under his arm as he retraced his way to the main valley. Turning in the same direction he had followed ever since first entering the valley, Red-foot kept on for a few hundred yards, showing no incertitude though the side walls of the narrow valley were rapidly converging into a single ridge, steep and rocky, looking like a barrier impassable for aught save-a mountain cat or a big-horn.

And then—the silent figure seemed to vanish— "Hardly any need of that," was the response, to melt into air or to pierce the rocky base of self. Cook me some meat." the cul-de-sac itself.

There was a simple solution to this seeming mystery, however, and the narrow, low-roofed passage into which Red-foot plunged, was no secret to many of the cowboys and ranch-owners round about. It was curious, but simply a freak of nature such as has more than one par-

Instead of the valley being "no thoroughfare," as an imperfect inspection would lead one to believe, a narrow tunnel-like passage led directly through the high curve of rocks, and following this opening, one would emerge into a second valley almost precisely similar to the one opposite. Here, as there, the walls of the valley came together in an obtuse angle. From this side, as from the other, only a close search by a stranger would reveal the means of going further in that direction.

Red-foot hurried through the tunnel, stooping low to guard his head from the occasional projections of rock, one hand running lightly along the side wall as he proceeded, for in here the darkness was intense, and seemed almost palpa-

He parted a thick screen of vines and bushes similar to the curtain through which he had made his way on the opposite side, and stepped immediately out into the clear moonlight.

He cast a swift, searching glance about him, fear of discovering danger or aught to be avoided, since he made no effort to hide his own movements. He strode rapidly across the bare space, plunging into a mass of stunted timber and shrubbery, near the center of which, in an artificial glade, was a low, rude hut of logs, heavily thatched with brush and dry grass.

"Who comes?" uttered a deep, stern voice, followed by a sharp, significant double click. Red-foot uttered a peculiar cry, following it

with the words: "Save your cartridge, Old John, for better

game!" "You fool!" came an angry, yet relieved, retort. "Some night you'll make a sign too late!

Will you never learn that—" "Oh, give us a rest, won't you?" growled Red-foot, using the current slang with surpris ing fluency for one of his color. "Suppose you do blow a tunnel through a fellow? That would be the end of my trouble, while you'd have to study over the problem of how to dispose of the remains with the least trouble to your lazy bones."

Old John, as Red-foot called him, gave a surly growl as the younger man brushed past him and crossed the threshold.

"Lazy-bones!" he grumbled, with a vicious glitter in his black eyes, as he followed after. "Not so lazy but that they're capable of lick-

ing a little more respect into your carcass, boy!" "I've heard that same threat before," sneered Red-foot, turning with a hand upon the knife at his waist, "and I give back the same answer, Blow for blow, and I'm betting long odds my blade gets there quicker than your fist!"

For a single instant it seemed as though Old John was about to put this to the test. Eye met eye, and it would have been a difficult matter to decide which pair sparkled the most viciously. Only for a single breath, however. Then the old man cowered, his stern tones drop-

ping to a miserable whine. "He wants to murder his own daddy! The boy I've nursed, and petted, and slaved, and sinned for! The boy I've made what he is-"

"Something to be proud of, isn't it?" sneeringly interposed Red-foot, dropping his bundle and flinging out his bare arms, revealing his almost filthy rags by the red light of the cheerful fire. "Something to be thankful for, eh? Shall I go down on my hunkers and call the choicest blessings of Heaven down upon your pious head for making me-what? An outcast! A vagabond! A filthy red-skin dog!"

Red-foot had shown more than one curious trait that night, but this was the strangest one of all. Greatly as be had surprised Basil Brock by his swift changes, this would have opened the eyes of the young rancher even more widely than all the rest combined. Truly, for a

full-blooded red-skin as he laid claim to being,

Red-foot was a queer compound.

Old John cowered before the scornful youth, his bent form becoming still more bowed as he shuffled sideways to the wall of the hut, where he cautiously deposited his repeating-rifle, dropping a tanned buffalo-bide before it. And his doleful whine grew even more pronounced as he ventured a subdued reply:

"Am I all to blame? Must I shoulder all the fault? Then it's time to put an end to all

this-"

"Where's that girl?" interrupted Red-foot, casting a swift glance around the hut, taking an involuntary step toward the swinging screen of skins that divided off a portion of the one room. "I'm hungry as a dog! Where's Meta?"

Even as the name passed his lips, the curtain of skins parted near the center, and a graceful form appeared—that of the Indian girl who warned Laughing Leo of the poisoned waters. "Meta is here, brother," she said, gently.

"I'm hungry, and too tired to wait on my-

Blunt enough the words, but uttered in a vastly different tone of voice from that used toward Old John. And Red-foot seemed more than half ashamed to make the demand. Truly, he was a curious Indian.

For that matter, a curious lot, from Old John to Red-foot, yet none who knew them had the slightest doubt as to their being pure-blood Indians in all save a certain degree of education

and acquired manners.

After all, it was not so strange, so many curious changes have taken place among the Indians of latter days. Among them may be found well-read men, but who are none the less perfect savages. Education is not all. A few years spent in civilized society, in studying, in mental training, does not always transform an Indian into a pale-face. The instincts of his people remain, and are most certain to break out sooner or later. And a "backsliding" Indian is ever the worst of all Indians. He must make amends for what he has suffered while under restraint. And thus it was with Old John and his little family, so those who knew them best were free to aver.

Very Indian-like were both the men, now. They squatted on the bare floor, smoking their pipes in silent gravity, gazing at vacancy, while Meta-lupa-startling contrast to them both in looks and garb and neatness!-busied herself in cooking meat for the young savage.

Red-foot has already been described with sufficient distinctness for the minor part he is to play in this drama, but a few words may be devoted to Old John, his self-admitted father.

Less ragged, less dirty, more presentable in every respect save that of youth and strength and physical comeliness than his worthy offspring, Old John was yet anything but a re-

putable looking fellow.

His frame was large, and clearly had once been possessed of no mean degree of power. but it was so bowed as to seem absolutely deformed. He was emaciated to a marvelous degree, his dusky skin lying in hideous wrinkles over his bones, the snake-like sinews crawling and writhing with each movement of his limbs, adding to his general repulsiveness. There was little resemblance in his form or features to either of his children.

His face looked that of the pure Indian: high cheek-bones, narrow, receding forehead, retreating chin, yet broad and square; a thin nose, curved like the beak of a hawk, with flexible nostrils, deep-set eyes, jetty black and still brilliant with the peculiar sparkle of a snake.

An uncanny-looking creature was Old John, by which name alone he was known to the white inhabitants of the range. And he bore a reputation to the full as uncanny, though there was nothing purely evil in this reputation.

He was said to be marvelously skilled in herbs and roots, and many a broad white dollar passed into his skinny palm from cowboy and herder in exchange for mysterious compounds or salves for hurts and cuts and bruises. Nostrums that were said to effect all that the old "medicineman" claimed for them, too.

Few save those who scught him had ever met with Old John, for he rarely left his secluded retreat where he had dwelt for no one seemed able to say how many years. Those longest on the range were wont to declare that Old John was a still older residenter than they could lay claim to being.

More was known of his little family, however. Something of the habits of his son has already been said. And the fame of his daughter, Metalupa, was even wider spread, though of quite a different sort.

Her beauty, truly remarkable for an Indian, among whom it is extremely exceptional to meet with a girl who would be deemed even moderately good-looking were her skin white, despite the numerous tales wherein "lovely maidens" and "beautiful princesses" abound. was doubly interesting for that very reason. And more than one susceptible cowboy had indulged in blissful dreams of winning and wearing "Old John's girl," only to meet with sore defeat and humiliation. Not only at the hands of Meta-lupa herself, but from Old John and

even Red-foot. And in such cases the peculiar reputation which the "medicine-man" had won among the somewhat superstitious cowboys, now stood them in good stead. There might be too much danger-not from bullet or steel, though the family ever appeared ready to resort to these stern arguments in case of need-but one who could work such marvelous cures might well effect their opposite, if driven to the wall. And so Meta-lupa remained ungathered from the parent stem. So she escaped being carried off Lochinvar fashion by some wild and woolly cowboy.

With silent deftness Meta-lupa completed her task, placing the hot and appetizing meat before her brother, who gave a truly Indian grunt as he set about devouring the steaks.

The girl stood in silence beside him for a few moments, then bent and gently touched her warm, red lips to his forehead. She performed the same action as she passed over to Old John's side, then asked:

"Is there anything more for me to do? If not, I will go."

Red-foot glanced up with an ugly sneer on his thin lips.

"This tepee is not good enough for you to sleep in, eh? Or is it those who share it with you, Meta-lupa?" "Neither, brother," was the quiet reply.

"I will remain here, if you prefer." "Go to your own lodge if you like it better. Why should I prefer your stopping here? Go-

I may call and see you, though; I have something to show you." Meta-lupa hesitated for a brief space, then, as

nothing further was said, she silently turned and left the hut. Old John rose to his feet and stepped silently

to the door, opening it just wide enough to afford him a glimpse of the maiden moving across the glade in the direction of the little hut which she had built with her own hands, and where she nearly always passed the night, of recent times. As though satisfied, the old red-skin closed the door and resumed his seat and pipe. But as soon as Red-foot showed signs of having eaten his fill, Old John grunted:

"Well?" Red-foot seemed in a much better humor since eating, for he gave a light laugh as he refilled his pipe, then said:

"It is well, from all I could learn."

"Then you-eh?" than you could guess if you spent a year in trying," chuckled the red-skin, nodding his head in savage glee.

Old John frowned darkly, and looked far

from being at ease. "It's risky-too risky!" he growled, with a vicious snap of his still sound teeth. "There are many besides the hated one who drink at the spring! It is a blind trap, and may catch the wrong bird. If so-and there is a close hunt -who so likely to be looked at with suspicion as Old John, with his herbs and powders? You

gold than that man pays you!" Red-foot laughed lightly as he flung out one

are a fool, boy! The risk is worth much more

hand with a gesture of contempt. "Is it that you are brooding over? Bah! a

mere side issue, hardly worth remembering!" "When it puts a rope around our necks--" "There'll be plenty who will come forward to throw it off again, let me whisper in your shell-like ear, old man!" laughed Red-foot, with real or admirably assumed carelessness. "Unless the job is completed by this, it will come to nothing. I go in the morning to take away all

"Make sure of the little sack, boy-make sure of that, no matter what you do about the other!" eagerly muttered Old John. "Let it remain until it all melts and runs away, if you like! We know enough to keep from touching the water, and as for the whites-curse them! who cares for what comes to their lips? Not Old John!"

"Nor I," was the prompt acquiescence of the younger rascal. "But such are my orders, and when a man pays so royally, be sure I'll keep to the very letter of the bargain-until I see a chance for raising the stake in another quar-

"Little enough-little enough for the risk!"

growled Old John. "But that's only one job, you understand," laughed Red-foot, as he stretched himself lazily

before the fire. "I've done another this day that has paid me tenfold!" "In gold-good gold, boy?" muttered Old John, his snake-like eyes glowing avariciously

as he leaned toward his hopeful son. Red-foot took a handful of gold coin from his rags, and tossed it with an air of lordly carelessness toward bis father. With mumbling cries the old rascal scrambled after the coins. Red-foot laughing with insolent scorn the while. Where the gold went to, only Old John could have told, but his hands were empty when he

resumed his former position. And then Red-foot tersely told him what he had accomplished that day, concealing nothing save the name of the man who hired him to do

the dastardly deed.

that can tell tales."

"Even that I'll tell you after to-morrow passes," he added. "Then even you, who stick as close to this den as a bear to his hole in midwinter, will be able to point out the man who pours out gold like water in order to be revenged on those he hates. Even you would be smart enough to read what is a riddle as yet."

"But the risk—think of that, boy!" uneasily muttered the old red-skin, a nervous shiver shaking his bony frame as he cast a look over one shoulder. "All this will cause talk. And wild guesses. And maybe there will be those who will turn their eyes in this direction for the hand that did the work!"

"Let them look—who cares?" sulkily.

"I care!" was the sharp retort. "And if the rope is put about my old neck through your rash acts-well, time enough for threats!"

Old John stopped short, with a wholesome fear of his savage cub. Red-foot was gazing intently into his face with anything but filial love in his glittering eyes. And there was an undercurrent of menace in his voice, rather than in his words as he spoke again:

"It is time you buried that ancient bugbear, old man. It used to frighten me, but that was when my years were less and my love for the man who called me son much greater than now. Then I was content to follow your lead, and what has it brought me to? This!" flinging out his arms and glancing over his ragged attire.

"Better rags with a sound neck, than—" "The rags are mine, the threatened neck yours!' with a hard laugh. "Still, you are my father—or so you say, and—"

"Do you dare doubt that?" fiercely cried Old

John. "I only wish I could," with a mock sigh. "I'd pick out a heap more respectable father if I had another choice. But let that go. I wanted to talk business, and here it is—sharp and sweet!

"Down there," with a careless wave of one hand in the direction of the main ranches, "they look upon me as an idle, drunken, stupid vagabond. They think I am blind as a rattler in August to all that hasn't a flavor of bad whisky about it! But for all that, I've used my eyes and ears and wits until-listen, old man!

"You know how much stock-stealing and raiding there has been going on in this section ever since the land began to fill up with cattle and horses. You may have even suspected what I now know; that there is a strong and regularly organized band of raiders, who go to work sys-"Did the work set me to do, and even more | tematically and do their business up to the handle. And drunken dog as they call me, I can put my hand on the chief of the band at an hour's notice!"

> Old John gave a grunt, but this declaration interested him much less than Red-foot had car-

> culated. With a scowl he added: "Serve you right if I dropped the matter right here, but I'll do better. I'll tell you that if there is any ugly row kicked up about my work of to-day, and there comes any troublesome looks in this direction, I can make all safe—I can wipe out the old secret which has troubled you for so many years, by selling my discovery to the proper authorities. They will pay an even longer price than that for the information I can give them. Ha! that stirs your cold blood, does it?" with a sarcastic laugh as Old John sprung to his feet, strong emotion imprinted upon his withered visage.

> "You think—you will do this for me, boy?" he muttered, his voice husky and choked, something like tears dimming his eyes, incredible as that may seem—incredible as it did seem to Red-foot, who stared at him in utter amaze.

> "Why not?" he laughed, casting off this strange feeling, briefly shaking the hands of the old man, then dropping them in turn to his precious bundle, breaking the string and unrolling his gay garments. "Why not? since I am going to open up a new and better life for myself—and here is the beginning!"

> Old John glanced at the gay garments, then resumed his seat, smoking with nervous haste that betraved how deeply his emotions had been stirred. But Red-foot paid little attention to him, seeming like a boy with his first pair of boots as he turned the gay clothes over and over under the light of the fire.

> "Of course you don't know much about such things-if you ever did, you've for otten them now. But I'm young-young and handsome enough, helped by these fine feathers, to win even a look of admiration from her glorious eyes! And Meta will understand me better than you can—that's why I told her I'd drop in to see her before turning in for a good long snooze!"

> While uttering these words, Red-foot was gingerly rolling up the garments again, and with them hugged to his breast-much as a lover might hug a sweetheart—he left the cabin and strode over to the little hut where he found Meta-lupa.

Calm enough to all outward seeming, but with a heart that fluttered violently beneath her dress, and a pulse that beat high with mingled dread and anxiety; for she had barely succeeded in reaching her hut in time to avoid being espied by the keen eyes of her brother.

Proudly enough Red-foot displayed his treasures to Meta-lupa, fortunately so deeply interested in them that he failed to note her agitation, her unsteady tongue. And as he held the gay garments up so as to display their charms to the greatest advantage, he exclaimed:

"Are they not gay? Gay and fine enough to go courting in, Meta?"

"Courting-you?" she ejaculated in un-

maiden?"

feigned surprise. "Why not?" with a sudden frown, as he began refolding the clothes. "My skin is red, but what of that? Am I so hideous? Am I old and deformed? Am I a thing to shock the eyes of a

"You are handsome as the best, brother," was the quick response. "And the girl you go to see, should be proud-very proud! Who is it, brother? May I know her name?"

If not genuine, this interest was admirably counterfeited, and it brought smiles back to the face of the red-skin dandy-that-was-to-be.

"Time enough, Meta-time enough when I ask you to go with me to see for yourself how well and proudly I have chosen. It will not be long to wait, little one," with a laugh that was soft and even musical. "To-morrow I wear these clothes for the first time. To-morrow night I will know whether to tell you her name or to curse the stars that withess my disappointment!"

Without waiting for her reply, Red-foot turned and left the hut, striding back to where Old John was waiting his return to question him more closely concerning the long-dead hopes his words had wakened.

And Meta-lupa sat before her dying fire, her face hidden in her hands, thinking-thinking!

She had overheard all that passed between her father and brother in the other hut. She knew that Red-foot had, urged on by the gold of some bitter enemy, dealt still another blow at Laughing Leo. And-

"I'll do it!" she suddenly exclaimed, lifting her head, her dark eyes flashing with resolution. "I'll do it—let the cost be what it may! I'll do it—though they kill me after!"

CHAPTER XI.

WHEREIN CICERO GETTETH PINCHED.

"EH? What? Where?"

The voice of Cicero Boggs, not particularly eloquent, but wonderfully comprehensive, secing there was wonder, doubt and disgust enough in each explosive word to form an entire volume of ordinary emotion.

From a seeming dead man, the lawyer's clerk was suddenly transformed into one living and conscious. The closed lids opened, and the greenish-gray eyes swept wonderingly over the leafy canopy above them, dimly visible by the light of the moon sifting through the tree-tops. Then the head in which those eyes were set, lifted from the cool earth with spasmodic energy, rolling from side to side as its owner stared at the grim, dark figures by whom he was surrounded.

Only for a moment. His head dropped back with a sullen thump, his eyes closed, and a groan of disgust came from his lips.

"Boggs, you're an ass—an idiot—a fool for the lack of sense! I always suspected it, but now I know it! Somebody fetch a grasshopper to kick my brains out!"

"Are you so anxious to die as all that comes to?" a clear, mellow voice uttered close beside the groaning, lamenting, utterly demoralized law clerk. "If so-wouldn't this serve your purpose quite as well as the gay and festive hopper-de-grass?"

Cicero Boggs shrunk from the cold muzzle of a revolver as it significantly touched his temple, his eyes flying open and darting a wondering glance into the face of the speaker. And there was nothing feigned in the surprise that filled his voice as he muttered:

"Drunk, dreaming or still walking in my sleep! The voice of the bewitching Queen Sate, but the face of a— Eh? Good Lord!"

Handsome enough the face that bent so closely over him, but it was just as surely that of a man as that the voice was marvelously like that of Sarah Anne McAvoy. And there was little of the woman in the vicious force with which this man pressed his weapon against the shrinking, shivering skin.

"Yelp out loud, you sneaking spy, and off goes the roof of your cabeza! How many more of your sort goes creeping around here? Speak quick and clear, but not too loud-you know what that means!"

"There's only one of me-and I wish there wasn't so many by one!" faintly gasped Cicero Boggs, shivering like a mass of calves'-foot jelly. "Don't- Oh, Lord! Good-by, Maggie! Tell

the babies-" The man who was gifted with the voice of Queen Sate rose erect, and with one foot he sharply tapped the groaning, moaning, lamenting lawyer's clerk across the lips.

"Drop that howling, you bloodhound. know you-I know what brought you here-and I can tell you precisely how this little trip of yours is going to end, too! Shall I?"

"In breaking my neck if I can't succeed in breaking myself of this abominable habit!" spluttered Cicero Boggs, his self-indignation seeming to get the better of his fears. "It is

shameful! Atrocious! It is-did you ever walk in your sleep?" abruptly appealing to the handsome young man whose voice so marvelously resembled that of Miss McAvoy.

"That's too thin, my covey!" with a hard

cruel laugh of scorn.

"Eh? Too- What brought me out here at this dead hour of night? Why ain't I in my bed, soundly- To think! And I the father of a young and interesting family!" he groaned, closing his eyes as though with the vain hope of shutting out his own shame and disgrace.

A strong hand grasped him by the collar, jerking him to a sitting posture, dragging him bodily back a pace or two until the trunk of a tree held him in a half-erect posture when that hand released him. And there was a second figure beside the man with the same voice as Queen Sate; that of a heavy-set man with low brows and a general hang-dog appearance.

"Speak to this moaning innocent, Double-six, and tell him just how you happened to make

his acquaintance a bit ago."

"Was on the watch, as you know, boss," growled the stunted Hercules. "See'd somebody comin' this way. Knowed ef he wasn't a fri'nd he meant mischief. Watched him. Ketched him creepin' up nigh this, es ef to take in what was goin' on. Jumped the critter an' knocked him silly. Thar!"

"You can swear that he was spying on us?"

"Double over, boss!"

"And I can take oath he is not nor ever was one of us. Putting this and that together, it's easy enough to guess just what the rascal is: one of those cursed detectives, come up here to fatten on the lives of honester men! But we'll read him a lesson such-"

Cicero Boggs gave a hollow groan, and judging from his tones he was the most miserable

creature in all the range.

"Isn't this lesson enough?" he muttered, trying to bring his tigh ly bound hands into view. "Isn't it bad enough to be a somnambulist—to go trolloping all over the country at the deadest hour of night, uot knowing whether you are dressed for company or not? Isn't that punishment enough? Let alone getting a back caved in and a head put on one big as a mountain? Good land o' liberty-yas!"

"Is that your defense, Wirt Dalton?" sharp-

ly demanded the other.

Another groan from Cicero Boggs, through

which ran a vein of angry despair.

"You've got a touch of the same disease, have you? Confound Wirt Dalton! I'll sue him | cal experience you can not be sure. Well, unless for slander! I'll get an order from court commanding him to show cause why he shouldn't be compelled to paint his face red, blue, green or yellow-anything to keep him from looking like me-a husband and a father with-eh?" "You are not Wirt Dalton, then?"

Cicero Boggs suddenly calmed his hot indig-

nation, uttering quietly:

"You don't happen to have such a thing as

a Bible about you?"

There came the sound of a smothered laugh from out the shadows, and the chief himself seemed not a little taken aback by this query. Even Cicero Boggs, now that the words had crossed his lips, seemed to recognize the awkwardness of his own question, for he hastily added:

"Don't apologize-I'm apt to forget mine, at times. I only wanted to make affidavit, but my

word is as good as my oath, and-"

"No one present doubts that assertion in the least," laughed the man with the voice of Queen Sate. "I, for one, would as soon take one as the other, while neither is worth more than both put together! Can you unriddle me that riddle, dear fellow?"

"Must I try?" feebly muttered the captive. There was no answer from the man who was gifted with the voice of Queen Sate. He turned away from his captive and uttered a few words to his fellows-half a dozen in number, as Cicero Boggs could now see.

But the worthy clerk gave them only a passing glance as they bustled about gathering material for building a fire. His gaze followed this man with the voice of Queen Sate. And

more than the voice, too! In hight, in weight, in every outward semblance, unless it was his face, the resemblance was startling-was precisely what Queen Sate might have been had she donned masculine gar-

ments. Was it Queen Sate? Was it the Belle of the Range, after all, whom he had tracked from the

Emerald Ranch?

These questions troubled Cicero Boggs just then, even more than the peril which undeni-

ably threatened himself.

The fire was kindled only a few feet in advance of where the captive was sitting, and the red glow soon began to render all objects distinctly visible. And as the man whom he still suspected was a woman in disguise fairly faced this glow, Cicero Boggs keenly scanned his face and figure. The result was contrary to his expectations. Despite that marvelous resemblance as to voice and shape, he knew now that his suspicions were without foundation.

A handsome face, barring the marks of dissipation and evil passions, but a face that, when

scanned as closely as now, bore not the most remote resemblance to the beautiful Queen Sate.

His own face was being just as closely examined, and the chief of the outlaws-for such they surely must be-seemed far better pleased with the result than Cicero Boggs. At least, there was a cold smile upon his evilly-handsome countenance as he spoke:

"So! you still deny that you are Wirt Dalton, detective, from the Chicago branch of Pinker-

ton's Agency?" "Twice over, if that will convince you any

the sooner," was the prompt response. The chief frowned darkly. There was a promptitude about this answer that seemed to displease him. No doubt he would have preferred something more like the fear and despair which had until now marked the speech and

manner of his captive. "What brought you out here to-night, unless to spy upon our movements? And why should you want to spy on us, unless you are one of

those infernal hunters of blood?" Cicero Boggs hesitated for an instant, a half-

smile coming into his face as he muttered: "After all, why should I deny what is more of a misfortune than a fault or disgrace? I'm a-sleep-walker, sir!"

The chief flung out one hand with an impatient gesture, and his tones had little music in

them as he sharply uttered:

"You still stick to that ridiculous trick?" "It's worse than ridiculous—it's horrible!" groaned Cicero, mentally wringing his hands, since his bonds prevented him from doing so physically. "Think of it, my dear fellow-just try to put yourself in my place for a single moment? Get excited from any cause: take a single glass beyond your regular measure; anything or everything out of the common routine, and—there you are! Walking out of secondstory windows! Parading the most populous streets if you happen to be in the city--and that, more than likely, in frightfully abbreviated costume! Good heavens, sir! it almost drives me distracted just to think of it! For all of this, and a thousand times more, have I experienced in my wretched career!"

"Did you ever wake up to find a tight noose about your neck, and the rope so short that

your feet couldn't touch the ground?" "Eh? why, that would be hanging!" spluttered

poor Cicero.

"You think so, but unless you've had practiyou drop this nonsense, you'll have just that same practical experience, my fine fellow!"

This was no jest. There was a vicious earnest in every tone, in every gleam and glitter of those dar: eyes. And Cicero Boggs was keen enough to realize this without further argumene.

A sickly smile crept into his own face, and there was just a tinge of awkwardness in his confestion:

"I can't make you swallow all that, eh?"

"Not this evening!"

"Yet it is all true—I mean about my being an occasional sleep-walker. If you've got a-I mean, I'm ready to make affidavit to that effect!"

"And you were walking in your sleep when you followed me from the Emerald Ranch to this place? You were walking in your sleep when you crept up to eavesdrop our conversation? Don't answer in a hurry, my dear fellow. Take your time. The rope is not quite ready yet!"

Cicero Boggs shivered a little as he listened. Truly this was a decidedly disagreeable acquaint-

ance! "What did she-Miss McAvoy, I mean-" A swift motion, and a hand struck sharply across his lips, cutting his speech short. Hard

and menacing came the words: "No names, you bloodhound! Stick to your text, or up a tree you go, so quick it will make

your head swim!" "I meant no disrespect to-to anybody,"

quietly uttered Cicero Boggs. "You wanted to learn the truth, and I can't tell it all without at least alluding to—the person whose name you don't like to hear."

"So much the worse for you, then," was the cold, uncompromising retort. "You'll hang, anyway, but you'll hang all the sooner if your lips profane the name of that lady. You comprehend?"

"That it's a mighty little show you're giving me-yes," and his smile became very faint and ghost-like indeed.

"How much more show would you have given us-those poor devils whom you were sent up here to trap and drag to the gallows?" fiercely hissed the chief, while surly Double-six broke in with:

"Not a durned show, Pritty Poll! Le's yank him up nigher Heaven then he'll ever git ag'in! Tit fer tat—an' he goes out fu'st!"

Pretty Poll seemed something of a contradictory character, judging from the sharpness with which he turned upon Double-six, growling:

"It isn't your put, old man! When I say hang it is time enough for you to begin pulling on the rope!"

Double-six fell back with a low, sullen growl, but without further questioning the right of Pretty Poll to decide on the fate of their captive. Clearly, this man who occasionally used the voice of Queen Sate, was a man of authority among his fellows.

"You admit, then, that you were wide awake when you followed me from the Emerald Ranch? said Pretty Poll, turning to the prisoner.

"If you shake the rope in my face as a penalty, I suppose I must," slowly responded the prisoner, but with a wry face.

"If the rope wasn't there would you dare deny

"Why shouldn't I, when it is the simple truth?" That I followed after you, if you came from the ranch, is highly probable, since you got here before me; but that is the sum and extent of my offending."

"You were caught listening to our talk." "And terribly afraid some of you would hear my shivering and jump on my back-just as that gentle stranger did," with a forced smile. "But all the time I was wishing to gracious you'd. move on-or that I could pucker up courageenough to make an effort to steal away."

"Our talk frightened you, then?" with an ugly

sneer.

"Indeed it did," with unexpected frankness. "And why not? When I heard you talking of slitting my throat—this very identical throat, mind you!" and Cicero Boggs tenderly worked. the Adam's apple therein.

"We were talking of Wirt Dalton, and you deny being that man! How do you reconcile the

two?" sharply asked Pretty Poll.

"I knew you were mistaken, but what good would that do me if you slit my throat for that of Mr. Dalton without stopping to discover the error? You said that I-he-was in the ranch yonder. That somebody knew I was a detective. And so-you see?"

"That you are mighty fond of beating around the bush, making a terrible lot of noise without saying anything! Come! if you are not Wirt-Dalton, what are you doing in these parts? Why have you acted so suspiciously-stealing out of the house at midnight, on foot, dogging us here?

Answer this, if you can!" "My name is Cicero Boggs. I am a clerk in the employ of a firm in Minneapolis, lawyers, Messrs. Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale. They are seeking for a man who disappeared from sight years ago-if you wish I can probably recall just the date of his last appearance on record."

"Never mind the details. Go on with your cock-and-bull story! Then will come my turn." "This man, Melchoir Parkindale, has fallen heir to a vast sum of money, left to him by a relative in England. Messrs. Knifton, Bragg & Lawnsdale learned of this fact, and took hold of the case on speculation, knowing that success meant a big fee. They fancied some trace of Melchoir Parkindale might be found up in these parts, and they sent me off, post-haste, to inves-

"A smooth story, but it will hardly save your

neck, Mr. Dalton!"

tigate the matter."

"I've got papers in my effects at the ranch. which will prove all I state, if you care to go there to inspect them, sir."

"And have that wild Irishman send a handful of buckshot through my wardrobe? No, thank you! It's much simpler to believe you a

"But hardly as satisfactory to me, if I may venture to say it," muttered Cicero Boggs, with

a faint, shivering laugh.

"You don't count. Time is mighty near up, and there isn't much longer for you to spin the rest of your ingenious yarn. Still-go on and we'll see where you fetch up."

There was precious slight consolation in this. but Cicero Boggs grew more cool and composed the greater the peril that confronted him, and made the most of the time allotted him.

Being careful to mention no names. yet telling his story after a fashion that enabled his captor to readily follow his meaning, he told of his accident, of the adventure with the half-wild cattle, and his deliverance by Queen Sate and Basil Brock. Without disguise he admitted how the Belle of the Range charged him with being Wirt Dalton, his sole reservation being a concealment of her advice for him to seek his safety in a speedy flight. Of course he knew that Pretty Roll, in learning the rest must also have learnt this, but he shrewdly calculated it could do him no harm to show a desire to shield the lady as much as possible under the circumstances.

"You see, though I spoke up mighty bold, and declared that I would leave the country only after attending the meeting to-morrow, all the time I was resolved on running out of danger by the shortest route," he frankly admitted without a blush. "I waited until all in the house was still, and I believed everybody but myself was sleeping soundly. And then-I opened my window and jumped out, hunting up the first bit of cover to shut off view from the house, going from that to the next bit of timber, and finally coming here, little suspecting that the place was already occupied, until too late to

back out." "You left everything behind you-even to

your horse? You expect us to swallow all that?"

"The papers were only copies, and even should they fall into the hands of those who knew Melchoir Parkindale or his heirs, what harm? The discovery would come through the firm, all the same, and as they hold the original papers, nothing could be done without their agency. The horse? Lame-too lame for a man to trust to who's in a terrible hurry to get out of the wilderness. And as for taking up with the kind offer-I mean," with a slight stammer, as | can't help it-good Lord!" he caught himself, "as for borrowing a mount -excuse me! It was bad enough to be charged with being a detective, let alone running the risk of being picked up as a horse-thief!"

As Cicero Boggs briskly told his story, with all the air of one who is sticking closely to the truth, the face of his captor grew a little less hard, though still cold and suspicious. And as the clerk came to an end, he slowly uttered:

"That sounds all right. It may possibly be the truth. If you really are what you cliam, it would be hard to hang you for a human bloodhound. Yet I've sworn-reckon I'll have to stretch your neck!"

"Give a poor devil a show, won't you?" eagerly ejaculated Cicero Boggs catching at a straw. "Give me time and a chance to prove I'm just precisely what I claim to be! You'll never regret it, sir!"

Pretty Poll turned away and beckoned his men to follow. They appeared to be consulting over the matter, and, as may well be imagined, the prisoner watched them with breathless interest.

He drew a long breath of relief as he saw the men preparing their norses as if for the road, but it was not until Pretty Poll spoke again that he felt really reprieved.

"Somehow I half believe you are telling a straight story, despite the fact of your face so closely resembling that of Wirt Dalton. I won't hang you until I've settled every doubt as to

Cicero Boggs began to thank him volubly, only to be cut short:

"Spare your breath until you've got fairly out of the noose, my fine fellow, and that is not yet. I know one who can pronounce positively as to Wirt Dalton, and I'll fetch him to see you before meny more hours. Until then-watch him closely, lads, and if he tries to come any of his tricks, lay him out cold as a wedge in mid-

winter!" Without another word, Pretty Poll led his horse through the undergrowth and disappeared from view. Cicero Boggs was lifted into a saddle and firmly bound there by means of a lariat. Then Double-six took the rein and led the horse through the timber, accompanied by a man who had answered to the name of Johnson.

The open ground was soon reached, but Cicero Boggs vainly looked around in quest of Pretty Poll and the remainder of the party.

"None o' that, cuss ye!" grated Double-six, abruptly drawing rein as he sat behind the captive. "Though you'll hang, dead sure, I ain't gwine to have you marking out the trail sofashion! Len' a han', will you, Johnson? We've got to blind this chicken."

A heavy bandage was placed over the prisoner's eyes, and then the ride was resumed at a

rapid pace. For some time Cicero Boggs remained silent, seemingly cowed by the brutal jests which the two men bandied back and forth with their helpless charge for a butt, but finally he ven-

tured: "It's mighty tough, but I'll try to grin and bear it, if you'll promise me one thing, gentle-

"What's that?" grinned Johnson. "Want us

men "

to set ye loose?" "I'll give you a sight draft for a thousand dollars on the firm if you'll do that-but you're only mocking me!" with a low sigh of resigna-

tion as the two men broke into a coarse laugh. 'em out in hard, yellow gold," grinned Johnson. "Shorter than that wouldn't pay fer the mighty tall travelin' we'd hev to do to get out o' range of the boss-eh, Double-six?"

"Bet ver boots!" grunted the squat ruffian. Cicero Boggs heaved a sigh as he resigned that new-born hope. Truly, he was paying dear for his ill-tim d curiosity.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEREIN CICERO LOOMETH UP, BIG! For some time he maintained silence, but then he was seized with a strange, spasmodic sort of jerking that seemed wholly involuntary on his part. Double-six uttered a warning growl.

"Stiddy be jerks, ye durned critter! Think I hain't got nothin' better fer to do then to keep you from goin' flippy-te-flop all over seventeen counties an' a section? Ef they's a prickly-p'ar atween ye an' the saddle, play it was a quishion an' keep on plavin' ontel we git thar, durn ye!"

"Tnat's what I-wanted to-speak about!" panted Cicero Boggs, the words coming in jerks as spasmodic as the shocks with which his hampered form was agitated.

Double-six, who rode with arms extended on each side of his prisoner, grasping the reins, felt the muscles of his charge grow stiff and rigid

between those peculiar shocks, and instantly took alarm.

"All eyes open thar, pard! Chug him fer keeps ef he makes a break! Stiddy, durn ye!" with a vicious snarl so close to the ear of the afflicted man that Cicero Boggs gave vent to a gasping howl of dread.

"It ain't me! It's the—fits!" he panted, again stiffening in every muscle, like one who is desperately endeavoring to conquer himself. "It ain't because—I want to do it, but—because 1—

Dan Johnson was at his side, flourishing a particularly ugly-looking knife before his bandaged eyes, but correcting his error the next moment, causing the keen point to prick through the skin of the convulsed prisoner as he grated:

"Let up, or I'll sock 'er home good ten inches! An' be mi hty glad fer to git sech a good ixcuse,

"Water — whisky — anything, just so it's drink!" gasped Cicero Boggs, his voice hoarse and muffled with the tremendous restraint he was putting upon himself.

playin' bugs onto us, we'll git even fer the loss o' the whisky," hurriedly muttered Double-six, who was far from being as cool as his comrade; possibly because this strangely afflicted personage was, of necessity, clasped tightly within his arms.

"I'd ruther ram him chuck-up with this yer'!" growled the bloodthirsty ruffian riding alongside, reluctantly lowering his knife.

"Drink-choke off-fits!" The neck of a capacious whisky-flask was thrust between his shivering lips, and Cicero Boggs clung to it as a famished infant clings to its mother's breast. Clung to it, and pulled away just as vigorously, too, judging by the in-

wrested the flask away by main force. "Praise Heaven, from whom all blessings—

creased discontent of Dan Johnson, who finally

Double-six jerked his horse up, slipping to the ground, though still retaining a firm grip on the reins. He gave a big sigh of relief, as he turned to his comrade, spluttering:

"Swap critters with a feller, pard? Ef notbe durned ef I ain't goin' to double-up with you, ruther then that jerky critter! Feels like they was snakes crawlin' an' a-creepin' all over meugh!"

"I'm sorry—awfully sorry, gents," faintly muttered Cicero Boggs, doubling over in the saddle like one with "the starch all taken out of him!" "I tried to warn you-that I'm subject to-fits of this sort, but-it came on sooner than -ugh!"

Dan Johnson rode alongside and deftly exchanged mounts, one skinny paw gripping the unfortunate lawyer's clerk by the back of his neck and straightening him up with a force that bade fair to snap his spinal marrow. And there was a vicious energy in his voice as he said:

"Them fits don't want to come back in a hurry, critter, fer we hain't got no mo' good whisky to waste on the like o' them! You hearn what Pritty Poll said: we was to lay ye out cold ef you tried to come any o' your p'izen tricks over us on the way. Waal, you ketch another one o' them fits, an' you'll lay down to take a nap that'll last from then to Gabri'l's horn! It's me that says it, an' I'm little ole gospel himself!"

Cicero Boggs faintly ventured to say that he had tried his level best to fight off the attack; that he had been just on the point of warning them of his peculiar liability to such attacks on extra-exciting occasions; and that he sincerely hoped the whisky they had so generously given him would enable him to escape any further attack.

"You won't never hev but one more, any. how!" grimly retorted Johnson, as the horses were put in forward motion again.

Whether the whisky or the threat had the "Not fer ten thousan' dollars-unless ye han' greatest influence, can only be conjectured, but his mate, their captive spoke up: certain it is that Cicero Boggs was troubled no further with his fits, while that night ride lasted.

> Double-six led the way at a rapid pace, closely followed by the big horse with its double load. They had long since left the level country, entering the broken land which lay to the north of the ranches, winding their way through rocky defiles and intricate passes, making so many turns and crooks that, despite his greenness, Cicero Boggs began to suspect that his captors were lengthening the ride much more than was strictly necessary simply in order to reach the destination they had in view from the first. Still, he kept his suspicions to himself. Of course he had long since lost all idea of the course they were following, since he had no use of his eyes to keep tally of all their turns and shiftings. And, somehow, he felt that his present guard was far more to be feared than Double-six, who would make two of him, so far as bulk was concerned. So, as the wisest course, the lawyer's clerk maintained silence despite his uneasiness, both bodily and mental.

> At length, after a long and wearisome ride, the cutlaws came to a balt, and Cicero Boggs was cast free from his borse and lowered to the ground. Dan Johnson kept a tight grip on one

arm, at the same time pricking him just over the heart with the keen point of a knife.

"Hay-foot, straw-foot, critter! Straight after your nose, an' don't make trip nur stumble onless you want me to measure the deepness of your palpitator with this bit o' good forgin'! It's nigh as wolfish fer bleed as I be--that's hungry clean from eend to eend!"

With remarkable aptitude for a tenderfoot, Cicero Boggs rightly interpreted the meaning of his captors, and stepping high to avoid any obstacle which might, by tripping him up, offer the bloodthirsty rascal a fair excuse for murdering him, he obeyed the impulse lent by that tight grip on his arm. And a few moments later he was half-lying, half-sitting on the floor of a small, rude hut.

Dan Johnson was squatting on his heels before him, looking like a human terrier on guard, showing his wolfish teeth as though nothing would give him greater pleasure than a chance to make them meet fairly in the flesh of the helpless being before him.

Double-six was busied kindling a fire in the "Choke him with a nozzle, pard, an' ef he's rude fireplace that took up nearly all of one end of the cabin. He had already attended to the horses, seeming willing enough to work as long as his comrade took all the care of their charge.

> "Be durned ef I'd 'a' tackled the critter down yan-way ef I'd 'a' knowed he was sech a rickety kick-an'-flop es he's showed out sence," he growled, with a side-glance toward the captive. "S'pose 'nother of them cussed fits was to tackle him-what do, pardner?"

> "Fill him up with whisky from your flask, pard," grimly grinned Dan Johnson. "Tit fertat, ye know! You made me let him suck my quart, an' I'm goin' to git even ef I see hafe a chaince!"

> "Ef that's all, pard, fer glory-to-goodness!" don't coax him into a fit!" spluttered Double six, as he whipped out a huge flask and tossed it across to his mate. "Take the hull invoice-I'd. ruther not git even a smell at the cork then to hev him take 'nuther cut-up like them! I would so-double-over!"

> Cicero Boggs was making good use of his eyes during this bit of by-play, and was not long in coming to a pretty accurate conclusion.

> Double-six was a man who would fight anything that came in every-day shape, but he was strongly superstitious. With a frame that defied all physical ills, he was too ignorant to comprehend such spells as had assailed the captive. They awed him more than a dozen armed men could have done.

> On the other hand, Dan Johnson, though but a small man at best, and now but little better than a walking skeleton so far as flesh was concerned, was of altogether different metal. No superstition about him. Pure deviltry enough, however; malicious, cruel, heartless, without even a single redeeming trait.

> This was discouraging, for Cicero Boggs had come to the conclusion that the sooner he got out of this hobble, the safer his life would be. Pretty Poll would hardly permit himself to be talked over twice in the same fashion, and Ciceroknew that if once decided a detective, his single life would go but a little way toward satisfying the blood-thirst of these wholly desperate characters.

> Yet, what hope was there for him? His hands were bound behind his back. Strong cords held. his ankles together. He was deprived of the belt of weapons which he had buckled about his. waist before leaving the Emerald Ranch on that disastrous investigation. His guards were armed to the teeth, and while both were plainly men who were used to strike first and argue. after, one was plainly eager for a fair excuse to slit his throat.

Truly, the prospect was anything but com-

fortable! But the lawyer's clerk was a man who placed much confidence in the power of smooth talking, and as Dan Johnson exchanged flasks with

"Indeed, gentlemen, I only took the whisky under protest! Not but that it was-remarkably good, and I'm a thousand times obliged for the kindness-"

"All the same, you cain't talk this cork out. so you mought as well give up tryin'," bluntly growled the human terrier.

"Indeed, sir, you misunderstand me," faintly smiled the captive, with a deprecatory nod of the head. "I'm not pleading for a drink, although my poor throat is well-nigh parched for a sup of water, and-"

"Ef that's all, they's hog-wash a-plenty. Git

him some, pard." Double-six caught up an old blanket that stood on a shelf in one corner of the hut, vanishing from sight through the open door, soon after returning with the vessel full of clear, cold water. He held the bucket so Cicero Boggs could drink from the brim, as there appeared to be a lack of cups about the place. And with a long sigh of grateful relief, the prisoner bowed his thanks, adding:

"That goes to the right spot-thanks, my dear sir!"

"What fer?" laughed Double-six as he backed away. "I'd water a hog ef I ketched hime gruntin' fer drink an' they wasn't no swill

handy. An' Pritty Poll said we was to hold you in good order fer-"

"Fer the rope, when he fetches a man with him that'll sw'ar you're one o' them cussed bloodhoun's," laughed Johnson, viciously.

"But I'm not a detective," plaintively ejaculated Cicero Boggs, shrinking as far from that ugly glare as the nature of the case would permit. "I'm simply a lawyer's clerk, sent up here to find a man named Melchoir Parkindale or his heirs."

"We've hearn all that afore, an' it won't hold water." bluntly interrupted Johnson, his little

eyes glittering snake-like.

"Talkin' don't hurt, pard," expostulated Double-six, whose good-nature seemed to increase in equal ratio with the viciousness of his mate. "It's too late to think of ketchin' a snooze afore grub-time, an' sech chirpin' as he kin do won't hurt nobody. Let him talk!"

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed Cicero Boggs, with a grateful bow toward the stunted hercules. "If I am to be-if I am fated to die for the sins of another man, it will be some melancholy consolation to know that, sooner or later, the truth of my sad ending will make its way to the ears of my poor wife and her helpless babes! If you are married men-"

"Injun fashion, critter!" grinned Johnson, beginning to cut bits of tobacco from a huge plug, for the purpose of taking a smoke.

This seemed a damper on the piteous eagerness of the prisoner. His head drooped on his bosom, and for some little time he seemed buried in thought, doubtless brooding over his hapless fate. Double-six joined his mate in filling a pipe, and they squatted in silence, smoking with the indolent enjoyment which ever marks the true lover of the weed.

But Cicero Boggs knew that time was fleeing. rapidly, and that any hour might bring Pretty Poll with the man who could pronounce with certainty as to his being Wirt Dalton. Still, this did not give him even the ghost of comfort. For if so many had mistaken him for that hated detective, would not this other make the same

mistake?

It was only a forlorn hope, but he resolved to make the most of his opportunity, knowing from personal experience how much more amenable a man is with a pipe smoking beneath

his nostrils.

"Gentlemen, I hate to disturb you, but when a man finds himself in an ugly box like this, he loses all his politeness. Can't we come to some amicable arrangement? Can't I convince you that I'm the victim of a most luckless resemblance to another man? If I solemnly swear to you that I am not Wirt Dalton, nor any other like him—if I take the most solemn oath you can devise-"

"It ain't our say-so, critter," coldly interposed Double-six, while Dan Johnson grinned like a malicious terrier. "Even ef we knowed you wasn't a detective, we wouldn't dast to turn you loose afore the boss comes to decide on what's

your fate."

"Not if I made it well worth your while?"

persisted the captive.

"Not ef you could cram this cabin full to the roof o' yaller-boys, an' tell us to go in lemons!"

deliberately cut in Double-six.

As he attered the words he was leaning forward to pick up a coal of fire with which to relight his pipe, but a choking, gurgling sound checked him in this and drew his eyes toward the captive. A curse of mingled anger and awe hissed through his teeth as he saw a frightfully convulsed face, a form that was shivering and shaking violently.

"Nother fit!" he howled, springing to his

feet.

"Water-throw water-save-"

In choking gasps came the words from the lips of the sufferer, cut short as his figure suddenly straightened out, his feet sliding along the floor until his head fell with a heavy thump on the slabs.

From side to side he rolled, shaking and writhing after a horrible fashion, his breath coming in rapid gasps, and with a stertorous sound that was frightfully suggestive of suffocation.

With a howl of consternation Double-six made a dash for the pail of water, turning and hurling bucket and all in the direction of the sufferer. Fortunately it was aimed wildly, striking the wall and spilling only a portion of its contents over the purple face of the captive.

A gurgling cry of intense relief came from the lips of the afflicted man, for the cold water seemed to produce a magical effect. His head shot up and he assumed a sitting posture-but that was not all, nor what drew a snarl of won-

dering rage from Johnson.

Cicero Boggs had both hands free, and each hand as it swung swiftly around from behind his back, clasped a big-bored derringer! One instant, and then came a loud report, sending Dan Johnson over backward even as he started

to his feet, knife in hand! "Hands up, and empty, Double-six!" sternly cried the late captive, covering the stupetied Hercules with an aim that followed his slightest shrinking. "I don't want to kill you, but I'll have to do it if you hesitate another momen! Up with your hands, I repeat!"

Mechanically he was obeyed. As yet the sluggish wits of the outlaw failed to understand just what had happened. The change was so entire, so utterly unexpected.

"Turn to your right, Double-six. Keep your hands up, and bear in mind that I'll blow your roof off at the first sign of crookedness. Walk straight to the end wall. Closer, you rascal!" as the bewildered fellow obeyed like some automaton. "Until your toes touch the logs, and your lips can kiss them without sticking out further than your nose. And keep your hands up, will you?"

Like one in a dream, Double-six followed out these clear, sharp directions, pressing so close to the wall that a flea could scarcely have crept between his person and that barrier, his arms stretched at full length and his trembling hands

flattened out against the logs.

While speaking, Cicero Boggs was sliding himself over the floor toward the fallen outlaw, and while never turning his keen gaze from Double-six, he felt for and found the knife which had dropped from the unnerved fingers of the human terrier. With this he quickly cut the rope that secured his ankles, then rose to his

A single glance assured him that there was nothing more to be dreaded from Dan Johnson, at least for the present, and still keeping Double-six covered, warning him that certain death awaited his slightest movement until permission was given, he looked around until he discovered rope enough to serve his purpose.

"Now I'll relieve you in a few moments, my fine fellow," he said in cheery tones, as he stripped Double-six of his weapons, then stepped back toward the door, adding sharply: "About face, Double-six! Advance three paces, then lay down flat on your face! Lively, pard!"

"Don't butcher me, boss!" muttered the stunted Hercules, as he meekly obeyed. "It was me that spoke up fer ye when Dan wanted to-"

"That same speaking up saved me a cartridge and you a sore head, if nothing worse, pard, laughed Cicero Boggs, kneeling beside the outlaw, drawing his hands behind his back, deftly securing them, then performing much the same operation with his feet. "Up to that time I'd made up my mind to kill you both like wolves. six. After it, I concluded to use milder means if I could bring it about without too great risk to myself. Let it be a lesson to you, old fellow; there's nothing lost by giving even a crippled dog a friendly pat on the head."

There was no reply to this philosophical speech, but Double-six ventured to turn his head far enough to steal a glance at his fallen comrade as Cicero Boggs turned to look after him. A low, careless laugh bubbled from the lips of the "tenderfoot," as he parted the thick mop of hair with which the skull of Dan Johnson was covered, probing a bleeding wound with the tip

of his finger. "Just as deep as I intended," he chuckled, as he removed the belt of weapons from the desperado by unbuckling it, and then rolling the seeming corpse over by jerking one end of the belt. "I don't often make a wild shot, but you sprinkled me so freely that I wasn't sure but I

saw double." "Then he ain't—you didn't shoot to kill?" ven-

tured Double-six.

"What for?" with a short laugh. "Because he treated me like a dog, should I treat him the same? That may agree with your gospel, but it don't with mine, even though I be the bloodhound you call me."

Something like a groan came from the lips of Double-six.

"I'd ruther be shot dead in a minnit then run

off to taste the rope," he muttered sullenly. There was no reply to this, for Cicero Boggs detected signs of returning consciousness in the wounded desperado, and knowing that little though the terrier was, he would bite deep if

given only half a chance, he lost no time in binding him hand and foot.

This done, he dragged both of his captives to the end of the hut furthest from the fireplace, propping each up in a corner, so they could hope for no aid in freeing themselves from his bonds. This completed to his satisfaction, he proceeded to make the restoration of Dan Johnson complete by sopping one of the hats in the little pools of water that still stood on the floor, then vigorously mopping the face and head of the wounded fellow. If this failed to greatly improve the good looks of the terrier, it at least brought him back to his senses.

Coolly ramming a portion of the wet hat into Dan's mouth as that opened to give vent to a

volley of furious oaths, Cicero quoth: "Don't try to be a bigger idiot than Dame Nature made you, Danny, for that's useless. can stop your mouth for good, just as I've put your paws out of mischief, but I don't care to make you any more uncomfortable than I have to-see?"

"I'll git even—I'll git even yit!" snarled the

terrier.

"When you do, let me know, please," with a light laugh, turning to Double-six. "You look a little more reasonable, pard. Can you tell me just where this shanty is located? I mean with sufficient clearness to enable a stranger to get

out of the wilderness without waiting for daylight."

"I don't think I kin, boss," muttered the

thoroughly subdued man.

"That's honest, anyway, and I'd rather believe it than any directions you might try to give me. I never did admire tramping about in a strange range under the light of the moon."

Careless though he seemed, Cicero Boggs caught and read aright the savage hope which sprung into the eyes of the human terrier.

"I trust not, for your sweet sake, Danny," he laughed, with a significant display of his derringers. "You're too precious to die like a fattened hog ready for the pork-barrel; but you're too utterly 'way off if you imagine for even an instant that I won't send you in advance to clear the dark trail for my weary footsteps in case any of your blood-drinkers should stray along this way in search of yours truly."

"I wouldn't mind, ef I knowed you was com-

in' too!"

"How extremely well you must love me," mockingly; then, with an abrupt change of both face and voice: "unless you are really anxious to croak, Dan Johnson, you'll keep that bitter tongue a little closer behind your teeth. I don't care particularly about killing you, but I can do it without fear of losing a wink of sleep on that account. Shut up, now, and keep shut, or I'll salivate you for keeps!"

Not much like the "tenderfoot" they had captured! And Dan Johnson was not too big a tool to realize the difference. He was not yet ready to die; he wanted to live long enough to be assured of vengeance on this demon; and so he re-

lapsed into silence.

Cicero Boggs walked to the door and took a keen, searching glance around, then up at the star-studded heaven. Experience told him that it was yet an hour or two until dawn, and returning to the prisoners he spoke, mainly to Double-six:

"You fellows burnt your fingers when you picked me up, just as a good many others of the same sort has done. You were fools not to run me up a tree on the bare fact of my resemblance

to Wirt Dalton."

"Then the boss was right?" ventured Double-"Right or wrong-one or the other, be sure,"

was the laughing retort. "It makes little mat-

ter to you. And yet-listen: "I spoke the simple truth when I declared that I came to these parts on a mission; that I was looking for a party by the name of Melchoir Parkindale. There's big money in it if I can find him. You never heard of the man, have you?"

"I hain't," responded Double-six, but Dan Johnson was silent.

"I hardly expected any different answer, but my duty to the house made me ask the question. Now listen a bit further: I've got no particular grudge against you fellows, though I'm not saying that I haven't run more than one of your sort in out of the cold; but that is neither here nor there. Just now I'm hunting other game. You fellows can steal and run off all the stock in the territory for all I care. I'll not lift hand or voice against that, unless I receive orders to do so from headquarters; and that certainly will not be until after this little job is brought to a conclusion, one way or the other.

"Still," and his voice grew hard and metallic as he added: "I'm not a man to be crowded to the wall without doing some healthy kicking while that process is going on. If your fellows try to make me any more trouble, they'll find that, green as Cicero Boggs looks, he can handle

his tools with the most expert.

"I'm going to make tracks, just as soon as there is light enough to see how to untangle the knots you tied in your trail last night. I'll leave you here, for your mates to set free, unless some of them should happen to stumble on the shanty before day. In that case—well, I'll leave you company, though I won't guarantee them to prove very sociable. And as flying lullets are proverbially mighty careless, maybe you'd better put in the time praying for your mates to wait a bit longer before showing up. As for me -reckon I'll take a snooze!"

Turning away with a yawn, Cicero Beggs picked up the weapons taken from his prisoners, and dropping them close at hand, he stretched himself out before the cheerful fire, coolly com-

posing himself as if for a cat-nap. And before many minutes passed by, a gentle sound came from that direction. Actually the

fellow was snering! And Dan Johnson ground a savage curse of fury between his teeth.

CHAPTER XIII. "PLAY OR PAY!"

BRIGHT, clear, everything that the heart could wish for, dawned the day set for the meeting of the racers representing the Triangle and B. B. Ranches. And long before the hour appointed for the trial of speed, those curious to witness the race—a race for the most valuable stake ever run for in the Territory-began to arrive at the chosen rendezvous, full of speculation as to the result.

Although the excitement ran so high, there was comparatively little betting in sight. Even those—and they seemed to form the larger portion of the increasing crowd—who appeared the most confident that the bay horse was overmatched, at the agreed upon distance, made no attempt to back their opinion with money or hoofs. This fact alone showed how overwhelmingly the gathering was in favor of Basil Brock and against Laughing Leo.

Still, there were a few men who sturdily backed Tornado, bluntly declaring that "business was business," and horns won through an enemy would bring just as many dollars when driven to a market, as though they had come through the agency of a blood-relative. These few booked a number of bets, having no difficulty in finding customers, and though there was little or no money in sight, there bade fair to be a lively shifting of cattle after the race was over.

Not until near the hour named for the race to begin, did Queen Sate, escorted by Finn McAvoy alone, put in an appearance. This was greeted with loud cheers, long prolonged and heartily earnest enough to call a deeper flush to those rosy cheeks, a brighter light to her eyes.

Finn McAvoy looked a little graver than usual, and there was an expression in his massive face as he glanced keenly over the gathering, that only a man sorely out of temper or unusually ill at ease would wear. Possibly he missed his guest, Cicero Boggs.

Basil Brock had reacted the race-ground only a short time before them, but he was the first one to meet and greet the Belle of the Range.

"And oh! the pity of it!" ejaculated Queen Sate, as, with head on one side, her gloved hands tightly clasped and used as a partial support to her rosy cheek, her great eyes roving over the form of the young rancher with rapturous admiration, she raised her voice so that nearly every one present could catch her meaning. "All this, and it to be forever lost to posterity just for lack of a camera! All this, and not even a whitewash brush to catch and fasten it forever! Turn around, Basil Brock-turn slowly, that I may see just how nately yer tailor-or did ye sit up all night to do the makin' of it yersel', Basil dear?"

There was a general laugh, as well there might be; not because of the words in themselves, but there was such a broad contrast between the rapturous admiration of the first few sentences, and the broad, brogue-touched finale.

Basil Brock scowled blackly, but Queen Sate shot a consoling look from her lustrous eyes into his, that quickly drove the cloud away. And this was the more readily accomplished since Basil Brock appeared in a marvelously good humor, both with himself and all the company.

Just where it had come from Basil Brock alone could have explained, but he wore a regular jockey suit, from cap to tops, of the finest material and the gaudiest colors. The suit fitted his slender, well-knit figure to perfection, and if it had not been made expressly for his use, he had been exceedingly fortunate in his choice.

"There was not time, else I would have worn nothing but your colors, Queen Sate," he murmured, bending as closely to that lady's ear as he could conveniently manage. "Emerald green and gold-"

"Faith, my dear sir," laughed the Belle of the Range, her horse shying off a little, and thus compelling her to lift her clear tones a trifle higher, "it's green enough ye look now to civilized eyes, and there'll be yellow and to spare in the face av ye whin Laughing Leo turns at the winning-post with a look back to see what's happened ye that ye don't come up to congratulate him on the result!"

Basil Brock flushed hotly, then grew pale as death. He pressed closer, and rapidly mut-

tered: "My ranch against your hand that I win the viciously. race!"

"Wait until I see the other horse," laughed Queen Sate, tripping away from her ardent suitor.

Meanwhile those who had been agreed upon as judges by the owners of the rival racers were busy surveying the course, riding over it from one end to the other, seeing that the course was cleared of unusual obstacles, and that the turning-post had not been moved or otherwise tampered with during the night. For, gentle reader, more conversant with the conveniences of "civilization" than the rude make-shifts of "border ruffianism," you are not to expect the rigid rules and perfect appointments of Brighton Beach or Jerome Park.

The course was a straight one, one mile in length, the limit marked by a stout oak post planted in the ground. The racers were to turn about this post as best they might, then return to the starting point, thus making the race one

of good two miles. As the appointed hour drew nearer, many were the eager glances cast in the direction from whence the owners of the Triangle Ranch must come, and already there were offers to bet that neither Laughing Leo nor his brag racer would put in an appearance. That none of these offers were accepted went far to prove the great unpopularity of Leo Laughlin among his

neighbors, for probably there was not a person then present, unless it was Basil Brock himself, who had the faintest doubt but that the young rancher would put in an appearance for the race.

And then, just as Basil Brock was claiming the race and stakes by default, a small party was discovered rounding a clump of timber, coming from the direction of the Triangle Ranch.

"Where would your cattle be now, gentlemen, had I took up with your ridiculous bets?" cried Queen Sate, an exultation in her face and tones that sent a savage scowl into the bronzed face of Basil Brock. "Yonder comes Laughing Leo-and there's the winner of the race-for a hundred head! Who takes me?"

There was no answer, for Queen Sate was a privileged character. Nor did she wait to see if her bold challenge was accepted. A free rein and busy spur sent her good horse flying swiftly over the plain toward the approaching company—Laughing Leo, Spread Eagle Sam and a half-score of men employed on the Triangle | with that vicious cry. Ranch.

The partners were mounted, of course, since no man goes afoot on the range. Tornado, only the shadow of his usual self, was being led between them, and there was a strong muzzle secured over his jaws.

The loco-weed had done its work too well. With drooping ears and head that only the halters held on a level; with stomach tucked up; with ribs that showed as plainly as those of a finely-trained greyhound; with sluggish, dragging tread—the wreck of a once noble racer—the victim of a most atrocious plot!

Queen Sate, possibly because all others took pains to avoid them, wished to give Laughing Leo a friendly greeting, and thus show him that he was sure of at least one stanch friend and backer in the pending trial, had acted on impulse in setting spurs to her horse and dashing from the crowd to meet "the enemy," as they might well be called. But as her keen eyes—as good judge of a horse and condition as the best jockey in all the cattle region—fell upon Tornado, she forgot all else in angry wonder.

"What have you been doing to the poor beast, Leo Laughlin?" she cried, sharply, her eyes flashing vividly. "Is that the way you bring a race-horse to the score? Is it mad yo are?"

"Your servant, Miss McAvoy," coldly bowed Laughing Leo. "Oh, bother your compliments!" with an impatient bluntness that told how strongly she was moved by that sad wreck. "What has hap-

pened to the poor creature? What is the mat-"Locoed—that's what's the matter, mum!" grated Spread Eagle Sam, his voice low and strained, that dangerous, white, pinched look deepening about his nostrils. "Rattled by a

livin' devil-that'll be a dead devil afore the day grows old, ef it kin be proved onto him!" "Steady, pard!" warningly muttered Laugh-

ing Leo. Queen Sate glanced sharply into that white, haggard face, and her own rosy cheeks visibly paled as she exclaimed:

"Then you think-" "That you will act wisely by keeping a safe distance, Miss McAvoy," was the cold interposition. "Tornado- You can see for yourself!"

The black steed had lifted its head, and was glaring at the horse ridden by the Belle of the Range. Its nostrils were beginning to quiver, its flanks to heave in and out.

Queen Sate noted all this, but only by a passing glance. Her beautiful brows corrugated, and there was something of impatient regret in the tones with which she uttered:

ing!" The young rancher laughed, hard and almost

"There will be a race—if I have to carry Tornado instead of being carried by him, Miss Mc-Avoy. I'll cheat the devil so far, anyway!"

Queen Sate turned a shade paler and there was something close akin to terror in her voice as she cast an involuntary glance in the direction of the crowd, where the brilliant costume of Basil Brock was plainly visible.

"Then you think that he-" "I think that you had better go back to your father, Miss McAvoy, and keep further from Tornado," sharply interposed Laughing Leo, shortening his grip on the halter, patting the arching neck of his steed. "Whatever else suffers, I don't want you to come to barm through this devilish outrage. Go-do you hear

Without a word, Queen Sate wheeled her horse and rode swiftly back to the crowd. And when Basil Brock rode up to her side, she looked him full in the face, her own white as that of a corpse, her voice low and unnatural as she said:

"If this dastardly deed is your work, Basil Brock, and you dare venture into my presence again, I'll shoot you as I would a mad dog."

Despite his natural hardihood, and careful schooling of his nerves to meet unmoved the charges which he felt almost positive would be brought against him by his worsted rival, the

young rancher could not entirely hide his flinching as the woman he loved so madly uttered these fierce words.

"What deed? I don't understand you, Queen

Sate!" he muttered. "I pray that you don't! I'd feel disgraced forever if it should prove the truth-if what I fear is really so! Basil Brock, look me straight in the face and swear that you don't know who poisoned the horse that was to run against you this day! Swear that you nor yours tam-

Basil Brock burst into a harsh laugh. "Is it so? Discounting defeat, by the eternal! Drugging a horse to save a stake! There's honor and grit for you, gentlemen!"

pered with him so as to-"

Eagerly the men had gathered around, seeing from the agitated face of Queen Sate that something out of the ordinary course of events had transpired. Breathlessly they had strained their ears to catch the words that broke so impetuously from her paling lips. And now they stared aghast at each other as Basil Brock broke out

Only for a moment. Then a great majority made a rush toward the Triangle company, eager to see for themselves, and the most excited of all were those few who had backed their faith in Tornado.

Laughing Leo gave his halter to one of the men employed on the Triangle Ranch, riding forward to meet and check this wild rush. His voice rung out sharply, almost menacingly, as he cried:

"Keep your distance, gentlemen! You crowd us at your peril!"

"No harm meant, Laughlin," spluttered one of those whose faith had been pinned to the black racer. "We only wanted—is it true that Tornado has been drugged?"

"You can answer that question when I bring him to the score for the word, gentlemen," coldly retorted Laughing Leo, his blue eyes blazing like twin stars as one hand dropped to the butt of a revolver at his waist. "Until thenkeep your distance, if you please! If not-I'll clear the way if powder and lead can do it!"

Only one man and that man one who had come to be almost generally regarded as a coward; yet the excited crowd fell back instead of trying to press closer. There was something in the white face, the blazing eyes, the icy-cold voice that influenced them even against their

Then, too, under the care of Spread Eagle Sam and the cowboy, the black horse was showing signs of overflowing spirits rather than looking like a horse drugged or poisoned. From seeming lifeless and decrepit, Tornado was transformed into a fiery, prancing, snorting racer. This to a casual glance, from a distance Closer—Spread Eagle Sam knew that the worst was coming!

Laughing Leo knew it just as surely, but the knowledge only nerved him more tensely, only rendered him harder and sterner outside; within, his veins seemed filled with liquid

Back to the starting-post the crowd surged, and close at their heels rode Laughing Leo, coldly saluting Miss McAvoy, bowing to the judges who were curiously regarding him, troubled in mind and in face.

"Good-morning, Mr. Laughlin," cried Basil Brock, a peculiar smile on his bronzed face, as he touched the visor of his jockey cap. "Fine day for the race, isn't it?"

"I have not heard the judges call time, as yet, sir," icily retorted the other, gazing fairly into the eyes of his rival, but making no sign in return for that bow and salute. "Until then—we'll not cross hands, if you please." "Then there will be no race? How provok-

Basil Brock flushed hotly, but managed to control his temper. "All right, if you take it so hard, my fine fel-

low! I'd just as soon win from a boor as from a gentleman!" Queen Sate impulsively pushed her mount in

between the twain, one daintily gloved hand resting appealingly on the arm of Laughing

"For my sake, Leo!" she murmured, passionate love lighting up her great eyes. "For my sake—take my horse to ride!"

Not just what she first intended to add, but there was something that chilled her blood in that cold, almost scornful gaze. In that moment she began to hate Laughing Leo, almost as intensely as she had been ready to love him.

Without waiting for a reply, she reined her horse back; but this brief interposition had accomplished its purpose.

Spread Eagle Sam came up with the black racer, and as the cowboys all fell back in obedience to the gesture of Laughing Leo, a fair view could be had of Tornado. One breathless moment of silence, then the crowd broke into a loud buzz of curiously mingled emotions.

Even the greatest novice present could see that Tornado was in no fit condition for a race with the champion of the B. B. Ranch. Not one present but could see that Tornado had been drugged or poisoned.

"Look your fill, gentlemen!" cried Laughing Leo, his voice clear and hard as the notes of a bell. "You see what that cowardly hellwin this race!"

"Do you dare accuse me of poisoning your horse?" sharply demanded Basil Brock, pressing through the crowd, his face fairly livid.

"Does the shoe pinch you so soon?" cried Laughing Leo, fixing his blazing eyes on his rival. "Did I mention your name?"

With a rush that hurled aside man and beast like chaff, Finn McAvoy drove his big horse through the crowd and stood betwen the rivals, one hand closing on the arm of Basil Brock as he thundered:

"Drop it, you hot-heads! There'll be no fightin' here, widout Finn McAvoy takes a hand in an' the best o' ye know what that m'anes!"

"Never fear, sir," and Laughing Leo bowed deeply toward Queen Sate. "Gentlemen never pull hair in the presence of ladies."

"Nor do they play such cowardly tricks in hopes of getting out of a tight box!" growled Brock, viciously. "But that won't save ye this bout! The race was made play or pay, and unless you come to the score on time, I'll claim the stakes by a walk-over!"

"Keep your temper, Mr. Brock," coldly retorted Laughing Leo, showing his teeth briefly. "It's play—and you will be the one to dance to the music, too! Room, gentlemen, if you please! I beg it of you, since the presence of ladies for-

He sprung lightly to the ground, flinging his bridle to one of his cowboys, and striding up to the head of the black racer, patting its veinmarked face, muttering soothingly as he cast off the muzzle.

"Sure, man, ye don't m'ane to run a race win that crazy b'aste!" exclaimed Finn McAvoy, expressing the general amazement of his own accord.

"I believe I have the right to bring any animal to the score I choose, Mr. McAvoy," coldly retorted Laughing Leo. "You have nothing to say for or against, even though the fancy took me to ride a wooden saw-horse. Am I not right?"

"Divil take ye for a walkin' crab-apple, right or wrong!" indignantly spluttered the wild Irishman. "Ride a broomsthick av ye loike—devil a wan o' me'll say anither worrud, so I won't, now!"

Laughing Leo was hardly taking the proper course to increase his following, or to gain sympathy from the crowd, but he little recked for that. Just then he preferred a host of enemies to a single fresh ally.

"I wouldn't crowd it too fur, lad," muttered Spread Eagle Sam in low tones as he gripped the trembling racer more closely. "The hoss is goin' crazy! Fer God's sake putt that muzzle back!"

"Dead or alive, I said, Sam," grated Laughing Leo, his nimble fingers tightening the saddle in place, then taking the head of his racer and slipping the halter from it, in order to replace it with the bridle which he took from a white-faced, uneasy cowboy, who hastily scuttled away the instant his hand was free.

And none too soon!

The terrible loco-weed was doing its work, and the moment its head was free from the constant strain which Spread Eagle Sam had kept upon it from the moment the first signs of a coming spasm were perceptible to his practiced eye, the black racer plunged backward, screaming and neighing like a mad creature, scattering the cowboys like chaff before a high wind.

Spread Eagle Sam sprung for its head, only to be caught by the steel-like arms of Laughing Leo, and hurled aside as though he was but an infant. And then the young rancher cried, revolver in hand:

"Hands off, gentlemen! And I'll shoot the first man who tries to kill that black horse!"

CHAPTER XIV.

NOTHING SO UNCERTAIN AS A DEAD SURE THING.

Intense confusion reigned among the crowd as black Tornado broke away from his guardians with that frightful scream, suddenly transformed into an equine demon. Some were there who knew what this meant from past experience, and their excited cries of warning but added to the wild tumult as they used spurs and whips to urge their horses out of peril. And this very haste but served to make the confusion greater.

Men and horses were mixed up in an ugly tangle, from which came oaths and angry curses, everybody using their tongues and no one using judgment. Here and there rose a cry to shoot the horse before he did serious harm, and it was in answer to this cry that Laughing Leo pealed forth his fierce threat—a threat which all could see was meant to the very letter.

Crouching low back on its quivering haunches, the black racer glared viciously at the struggling mass before him. There was the red fire of madness in his eyes. The blood-tinged froth dropped in flakes from his open jaws, flying off in feathery spray with each sharp snort.

To those who sought room for flight and dodging, it seemed as though the black demon was only pausing long enough to single out some especial victim before making its savage charge.

And to more than one of those whose position rendered them the safer, with room in which to act freely, it even appeared as though Tornado was more particularly threatening his rival, the bay racer from B. B. Ranch.

Even as their excited cries of warning to Basil Brock rose high above the tumult, Laughing Leo felt a thrill of savage exultation, for he, too, saw the same thing. If Tornado, dying, should avenge himself!

There was time for no further thought than this. With a shrill, maniacal scream, Tornado plunged forward into the thick of the confused jam, biting, kicking, striking with steel-plated fore-feet, scattering the crowd to either side, cutting a clean swath through the mass.

Basil Brock narrowly escaped being crushed by the maddened beast, caught in the rush as he had been on his slender-limbed bay racer. But Laughing Leo saw him escape, and an oath of savage disappointment hissed through his teeth. Not that he wanted Basil Brock to die thus, but if Tornado had only cut down the rival on whose account he had been dosed so cruelly!

Through the mass, splitting the crowd in halves; but that was all. It was the final struggle of a noble horse against a frightful fate.

Tornado stopped short, stretching his neck far out, opening his jaws widely, drawing in the fresh air with a choking, whistling sound.

Then—high up on his hind feet he reared, wildly pawing the air with his fore-legs. One choking, anguished scream—then he fell over backward, striking the ground with awful force.

Even as he fell, Laughing Leo gained his side, but he came too late, for the black racer would never again hear or recognize the loved voice of its master.

With a revolver clasped in each hand, Spread Eagle Sam strode to the side of his Dandy Pard, wheeling and facing the still startled, still swaying crowd, his weapons partly lifted, his great eyes blazing like twin fireballs, his deep voice full of deadly menace as he thundered:

"Keep your distance, gents! Crowd too nigh, an' I'll begin building up a wall of dead corpuses right hyar!"

It needed but a single glance to assure Laughing Leo that Tornado was dead. In that backward fall he had fairly broken his neck. Accident had mercifully put an end to the torture of the loco weed.

"Let the gentlemen come, pard," he said, his voice cold and hard as when he had repulsed the mock advances of Basil Brock. "They can do no harm, now. Tornado is dead!"

"But not paid fer, yit!" grated the giant, his blazing eyes still riveted on the bronzed face of Basil Brock, who was now standing by the side of his bay, anxiously examining it to make sure it had come to no harm in that confused scramble.

Laughing Leo tapped the giant on the shoulder. Their gaze met, and the eye of the big partner fell first.

"Follow my lead as closely as you like, pard," said Laughlin, in cold, hard tones, "but don't try to go one inch in advance. You hear?"

The shaggy head bowed, and the giant lowered the hammers of his pistols, returning them to his belt; but there were those who saw that his hands still rested on their butts; that a single motion would serve to draw, cock and level the tools.

Now that the black racer was dead, the confusion quickly grew less, many of the company gathering around to satisfy their curiosity, while a few ventured to offer the white-faced rancher words of sympathy, more or less cordial as their different temperaments suggested.

To one and all, Laughing Leo simply bowed or nodded, his eyes for the most part following the movements of his rival who, again bestriding his dainty bay racer, was beyond the crowd, riding to and fro, carefully watching every movement of the horse to remove the last fears of its having received an injury.

"It's a sthreak av moighty bad luck, Laughlin," uttered Finn McAvoy, apparently having forgotten his rude rebuff of a short time before.

"But accidents will happen to—"
"This was no accident. Rattle-weed was put in the manger of my horse, and sprinkled with a drug that made him crazy to eat it. Why the hellish doed was done. I leave you to answer!"

hellish deed was done, I leave you to answer!"
The face of the wild Irishman turned fairly purple, and he said:

"Av it's proof ye kin give us, Misther Laughlin, there'll be a bit av a hangin' match the day that'll go far to show ye all honor's not did in the crowd that, maybe, has given ye more frowns than smoiles! And the fisth av Finn McAvoy'll be the foorst wan to grup the rope!"

Laughlin bowed coldly, though the speech was plainly earnest and well-intentioned, but just then he wished no friends, no aid in accomplishing the purishment of the dastardly poisoner or in avenging the murder of poor Tornado.

"You doubtless mean well, sir, but I reckon I can wipe out my own debts without calling in outsiders. And I believe we came here for a

Basil Brock had satisfied himself as to the perfect soundness of his pet racer, and resigning it to the care of a trusted cowboy, he was

moving toward the crowd gathered about the dead horse. His keen ears caught something of the last words uttered by Laughing Leo, and pushing his way through the circle, he spoke coldly to his rival:

"I am sorry your horse has met with an accident, Mr. Laughlin. It is doubly unfortunate, happening just now, when all our friends have come together for the purpose of enjoying a little sport."

"Possibly they may see some sport, even yet," coldly uttered Leo.

Basil Brock flushed a little, but still held his hot passions well in check. He felt that he could afford to appear magnanimous, now that his rival was so thoroughly down in the dust.

"Of course you know that our match was made play or pay, but under the circumstances, I hardly like to hold you bound by the strict letter of the match. If you beg off, I'll agree to draw the stakes."

His rival gazed steadily into his face while these words were being uttered, and for a brief space there was perfect silence. Then, clear and cutting, full of utter scorn, came the reply:

"You don't look like a fool, Basil Brock, but you talk like one!"

The insulting speech caused Basil Brock to start back much as he might from a slap in the face. One hand instinctively sought his hip, but he had removed his weapons when stripping for the anticipated "walk-over," and he had not rearmed himself since.

It was fortunate for him, perhaps, that such proved to be the case, for Spread Eagle Sam had him "lined" with the quickness of an expert, and he could not have drawn quick enough to foil death.

Basil Brock quickly rallied, and warningly flung up a hand toward his partisans who showed signs of breaking out in anger.

"Hold hard, friends!" he cried, sharply. "The man who chips in without asking my permission, is no friend of mine! And as for you, Mr. Leo Laughlin," turning toward his rival once more, his eyes glowing, his voice hard and vicious: "I'll ask you to repeat those words at another and more convenient time."

"If they are not plain enough, possibly I can bring others equally as true, to back them up," was the cool retort.

"Pay your debts first! Out of pity for you, I was willing to give you a chance to save yourself, but now—play or pay!"

"I'll do the first—you may have to do the pay-

Basil Brock, like one fearing to trust himself in the face of temptation, turned on his heel and pushed through the crowd, saying:

"Clear the course! And you, Messrs. judges, call up the horses for the race. I am ready at any moment."

Once more Queen Sate pushed her way to the side of the young rancher, making the same offer she had a short time before. The offer was again declined, though this time with a little more politeness.

"You mean well, Miss McAvoy, and I am truly grateful for your kind offer, even though I cannot accept it. The terms were fully understood; the pick of B. B. Ranch against the pick of Triangle Ranch. So, you see?"

"But you have no horse that can begin to compare with Red Rover, now that poor Tornado is dead!"

"I have one good enough to lose with, then,"

bowing coldly.

Repulsed, Queen Sate fell back; and with her retreated nearly all of the company, leaving the party from the Triangle almost alone. Leo smiled bitterly as he saw this, and muttered to his partner:

"You and I against the crowd, pard! If you had not stuck so hard against a division I'd have some sport out of it, even yet!"

"Go your hull len'th, pard," eagerly muttered the giant rancher. "Show 'em your grit. Bluff the durned curs! What matter ef we do git left. Thar'll be the fun o' skeerin' 'em—an' the world is plenty big fer us to wrastle a livin' out o' this range. Bluff 'em, pard! bluff 'em to the last horn an' hoof!"

There was no immediate response to this excited outburst. Laughing Leo was staring fixedly toward the patch of timber near which the starting-post was planted, gazing intently at a gay, brilliant figure sitting a horse just at the edge of the undergrowth.

What was it that brought the hot color to his cheeks? What made his eyes fill with such a

"Time enough, pard," he muttered, as Spread Eagle Sam, in his impatience, plucked his sleeve. "Time enough. We can claim an hour's grace, if necessary, after the first call of horses to the score. Put in the time as best likes you, pard. I'll back you up in everything, just so you don't begin a row. If that must come, let the enemy make the first move."

Spread Eagle Sam was staring fixedly in the same direction as his Dandy Pard, and a low,

meaning whistle parted his lips.

If Laughing Leo heard this whistle, be paused not to ask its meaning. He moved hastily away in the direction of the grove. And though that gayly dressed figure vanished almost as soon as

the young rancher cleared the crowd, he strode swiftly on, unnoticed by "the enemy," as they gathered about the beautiful bay and its silkclad jockey.

Spread Eagle Sam watched them for a few moments, then his hands were braced against his hips, his leonine head went back, his massive chest swelled; and clear, shrill, unearthly, there split the air the wild, maniacal screech of the war-eagle!

The effect was almost ludicrous.

Horses reared and plunged, riders uttered cries of wondering alarm as they glanced around in quest of the author of that thrilling scream. Red Rover plunged and reared, testing the skill of Basil Brock to the utmost to avoid being hurled from his tiny flat saddle.

Once more Spread Eagle Sam sent up the peculiar yell to which, almost as much as his characteristic "blowing," he owed the name he bore—a name far better known on the Buffalo Range than here where tame cattle had taken the place of their wild predecessors.

"Flutter yer feathers, ye buzzards! Droop yer tails when ye hear the war-eagle tunin' up fer a song o' triumph an' vict'ry! The ole Triangle 'g'inst the world an' all its 'lations! Five hundred head to add to its stock, good as won, an' I know it!"

"What lunatic is backing a dead horse?" sharply cried Basil Brock, with a glance over his shoulder as he strove to quiet his racer.

"A man, white-born an' decent! Turn your eyes this way, an' see what your lookin'-glass never showed back when you was alone an' squintin' into it'" cried Spread Eagle Sam, with another of his wild screams that sent Bay Rover off in another mad fright.

"Take all the bets that idiot offers, on my account, friends!" the angry rancher shouted, slackening his reins a little and rushing away on the back of his racer, hoping thus to calm it

down.

"Runnin' away from the face of an honest man!" laughed Spread Eagle Sam, now wholly in his element. "Takes time to git used to sech stranger things, so better jes' go one eye on it at fu'st, gents! Though I ain't in love with any o' the gang-leavin' out the ladies, in course!-I don't want to skeer ye all into fits! I'm Spread Eagle Sam-white, honest, chuck-full o' grit! An' I'm huntin' up the misfortinate critters as hain't got no more sense then to buck ag'inst the ole Triangle! Even up that we win the race! An' ef that looks too dead-open-an'-shet, why double the odds! Anythin' fer a bet!"

"Name your terms, and I'll take them, if they're at all within reason," coldly declared one of the party, who seemed to take the lead as a representative of the B. B. Ranch and its

owner. "Head fer head to a thous'n' horns that the bay colt gits beat!" boldly cried Spread Eagle Sam, whipping out his book to note down the

wager in case it should be accepted. Although the owner of Red Rover had made no reservation in calling out his readiness to take all bets, this was such an enormous one that Basil Brock's representative hesitated, turning pale.

Spread Eagle Sam laughed loudly, scornfully, as he noted this. It was glorious—he felt that already he was paid for all prospective losses. One man, and he backing down the crowd! It was glorious!

"Tuck water fu'st pop! Then I'll come down to your level, pard! They ain't nothin' mean bout me, 'cept the comp'ny I keep on sech 'casions as this! A rickety, blind, three-legged, week-old calf that the B. B. Ranch gits left!"

Still there was no acceptance, this time through pure rage and mortification at having laid themselves open to such a biting taunt.

"Too high up yit?" cheerfully laughed Sam, his face fairly glowing with delight at this wholly unexpected treat. "A counterfeit copper cent with seventeen holes through it, plugged with lead! Fer love o' sufferin' humanity, gents, do club together an' kiver this bet, even ef it does make the hull kit o' ye go dead broke an' in a stiddy run to see which kin git to the poor-house fu'st! Take me up, I beg o' ye! Anythin' fer a bet! Be durned ef I won't lend ye the money my own self!"

Even as he spoke, Basil Brock came galloping back, mounted on the horse of a cowboy, who hastened to carry him word of the startling offer made by Spread Eagle, leaving Red Rover in the man's charge.

And it was to Basil Brock that the grinning hide hunter addressed his last words.

"If you mean business, talk business, Mr. Ingalls," sternly uttered the young rancher, reining in his horse. "Big or little, I'll take every bet you can offer, to the last hoof or horn on the Triangle!"

"Got over your skeer, sonny?" grinned Spread Eagle Sam, but adding briskly, again drawing out his note-book and pencil: "Take it or leave it as too big a mouthful fer your stomach to stan', critter! Head fer head, big, little, old an' young, hoss an' cattle, ag'inst thar match from your ranch; I'm bettin' every critter on the ole Triangle that you don't win this race with that Red Rover o' yours!"

"You are witnesses, gentlemen!" cried Basil

Brock, with a sweeping glance around the astonished crowd. "Head for head as far as the stock of the Triangle Ranch goes, that I win this race with Red Rover!"

"We hear it, Brock!" came a general shout. "Are you speaking solely for yourself, or does your partner know what you are doing, Mr. Ingalls?" abruptly demanded the other.

"They's only one mouth atween us when we talk business, critter."

"Then I book the bet! And-mind you, my fine fellow!" leaning over in the saddle and shaking a quivering finger at the huge rancher, "I'll hold you to the letter of the bet! I'll strip Triangle Ranch of its last hoof, split or round, even though-"

"Won't ye win it fu'st, critter? Won't you give us even the show of a race?" grinned Spread

Eagle Sam. "I'll win it--and on the back of Red Rover!

Watch him close, gentlemen, and if he attempts to save his stake by a shot or-"

dumb critter fer the dislike we owe its master We don't chuck rattle-weed into the manger of a hoss we've put up a big bet ag'inst!"

"Do you mean to insinuate-"

"Sinuate be durned!" was the blunt interruption as Spread Eagle Sam strode swiftly to the side of the angry rancher. "I don't say you locoed Tornado—with your own hand! I don't say you'd hev grit or narve enough to try that on. But I do say this much: when this race is over, an' you've paid your losses to the last runted, stunted, rickety calf, I'll show the hull crowd the dirty whelp as locoed Tornado! An' when they've tuck a good, squar' look at him, as a moral curiosity, I'll give him a dose that'll make him sicker then pore Tornado ever was! That's what I'll do, an' ef you want me to speak out any clearer, why, be durned ef I don't try my level best to satisfy you—I will so!"

Basil Brock, in a voice that fairly shook with hot anger, turned his horse away, addressing

the judges:

"Call the race, or I'll run over the course and claim the stakes! Call the race—before I forget that there are ladies present!"

Sharp and clear rung out the summons of "riders up!" and the word reached the ears of Laughing Leo, who was hidden from view among the timber near which he had caught sight of that brilliant figure. Not alone. With the gayly-dressed form beside him. The garb which Red-foot had displayed with such pride-but Red-foot was not the wearer!

"I refused the same offer from Queen Sate!"

Leo muttered.

"Her horse would lose—mine will win! Take it—ride and shame that evil man! If not for your own sake, then-"

"For yours, Meta-lupa!" impulsively cried Laughing Leo, with a swift motion touching her brow with his hot lips, then leaping on the gray horse and riding at a leisurely trot back to the starting-point.

Spread Eagle Sam hastened to meet him halfway, his honest face all aglow with the rare sport he had so unexpectedly stumbled upon.

"The most fun!" he chuckled, but growing graver as he added, anxiously watching the face of his Dandy Pard as he spoke: "But I've bet every head on the ranch, pard! I couldn't let 'em bluff me!"

"I only wish the number was double, Sam," with a broad laugh. "I've got the horse that can down Red Rover at two mile-sure!" A motion of his hand brought the cowboys

around him, bearing the saddle and bridle with which Tornado had been partly equipped. And when the second call of the appointed judges came, Laughing Leo rode the gray horse up to the starting-post,

There was a low murmur of interest among the crowd as every eye turned upon the horse, and a fierce, almost savage light flashed in the dark orbs of Basil Brock, as though he recognized the animal. But there was time for no more.

The start was to be a standing one, and the sharp voice of the judge who had been selected to give the word, now rung out:

"Riders, are you ready? Then-GO!" In such a start, there could be no jockeying, but with marvelous celerity, the red and the gray leaped off, head and head, without the slightest appreciable advantage. But the murmur rapidly rose to a wild roar as the excited crowd saw Red Rover gaining inch by inch, foot by foot, until the gray horse only hung to

its quarter! But there it hung like a shadow, although Basil Brock, driven half-insane by the taunts of the huge hide-hunter, together with his mad lust for revenge on the son of the She Welf, used both whip and spurs with savage free-

dom. "Git thar, Triangle!" yelled Spread Eagle Sam, for once forgetting his celebrated scream. An' you jes' bet your boots she am, too!" with a fierce laugh. "Look at the monkey-rider play the whip! Look at them spurs! Glory to the etarnal! We've got 'em-got 'em bad!"

"The foolish divil!" snorted Finn McAvoy, one hand supporting the lithe figure of Queen Sate as she stood upright on her saddle. "Luck

at him latherin' the loife out av the poor baste! Luck at him pumpin' the wind out av him, an' divil a fut is he gainin'! It's mad the b'y hes gone-clane mad, an' divil a loie'll ye find in that worrud!"

There were plenty of others who saw how injudiciously Basil Brock was riding Red Rover, taking more out of him with whip and spur at this early stage of the race, than even the tremendously fast pace the gray horse was forcing him to take. And though it was now impossible for any of the party to say with anything like certainty which one of the horses was in the lead, owing to their position in the rear, many a lately proud heart grew faint and sick with a premonition of defeat.

Red Rover led around the turning post, but it was plainly from sufferance, for the next moment on came the gray, running low and level, until even the blindest looker-on could no longer doubt which animal was in the lead! In vain Basil Brock used whip and spur and "We are white men, critter, an' don't spite a voice. He had defeated himself during the first half-mile, and there were many shouts to greet Laughing Leo as he reached the post a winner, which would otherwise have been silent.

> CHAPTER XV. TALK WITH THE BARK ON.

BACK through the double ranks of spectators dashed the gray horse, Laughing Leo never so much as casting a glance over his shoulder to see how near-or far-his rival was, until after the winning-post was fairly passed, and the sensational race was lost and won.

Then he turned his head to look, and the ghost of a smile came into his white face as he heard the wild cheering of the crowd, nearly every member of which had been against bim until the last few moments. And he would have been more than human had he not felt a certain almost savage pleasure at the sight of Basil Brock, full a hundred yards behind, still plying whip and spur, the too hasty use of which had gone far to insure his defeat where defeat was more bitter than death.

Laughing Leo gently checked his good horse, turning it about and trotting back to the winning-post, where the judges were together, excitedly talking, gesticulating, evidently at fever heat. Laughlin called out, sharply:

"Your decision, gentlemen? Have I permission to dismount?"

"All right, Mr. Laughlin; you can get down. We'll give our decision as soon as the turningpost judges come in. Where in time did you pick up that gray ghost?" spluttered the judge, forgetting his importance in his curiosity.

But Laughing Leo seemed in no hurry to gratify this curiosity, for he wheeled about after a low bow, alighting when in the midst of his own cowboys, being fairly caught in the arms of Spread Eagle Sam and more than half smothered before he could extricate himself.

"Glory to the ram!" howled the balf-crazy rancher, tearing off his slouch hat and flinging it to the ground as a sort of platform on which to perform a frantic dance. "Git thar, Triangle! says I. An' we got thar—got thar in the most elegantest shape, an' didn't hev to more'n hafe try! Whar's the critters as tuck me fer looneymad when I lugged out a hull bogus copper cent an' made 'em all take water like waddin' ducks? We got thar-but I'd 'a' died a rich man ef thar'd bin anybody with grit enough on t'other side to kivered my penny!"

With his own hands Laughing Leo removed saddle and bridle, covering the gray winner with a blanket after the most approved racing style, until only head and legs remained in sight by which the horse could possibly be recognized. And all this was accomplished before Basil Brock succeeded in wheeling his beaten champion and reaching the judges' position by the winning-post.

The two men who had officiated at the mile post, had come in and made their reports. There had been no foul riding, and so far as they were concerned, nothing to offer by which the positions of the horses at the outcome ought to be altered.

"Gentlemen-riders-have you anything to offer before the official decision is given?" asked the judge put forward as spokesman by his associates.

"One word," hoarsely uttered Basil Brock, his face as white as its liberal coating of tan would allow. "The terms of this race were that any horse belonging to either ranch might be selected. You all know that I own Red Rover. Does that gray horse belong to the Triangle Ranch? If so-since when?"

"Will you oblige us with an answer, Mr. Laughlin?" gravely asked the judge, with a bow to the gentleman he addressed.

"I will answer any question you may say fit to address me, judge," with a bow that emphasized his words.

"The gray horse belongs to you, then?"

"It does." "Since when?" viciously grated the defeated

rancher. Laughing Leo turned upon his rival, his blue eyes ablaze, though his tones were cold and even as he retorted:

"Although I do not admit your right to ask

me a question, Basil Brock, I will answer this, more for the satisfaction of these curious gentlemen than for your own sake. The gray horse is mine, though only recently come into my possession. I had no need of one like him, good as he is, while Tornado lived. You know what happened to him, and—"

"Dare to even insinuate that I had anything to do with drugging or poisoning your horse, and I'll tear the lying tongue from between your jaws!" viciou ly snarled the half-mad

rancher.

"I never insinuate when I can bring forward plain proof," was the cold, even retort, Laughing Leo simply smiling at the fury of his baffled rival. "But to explain: My racer was locoed. I could not have withdrawn from the race, even had I wished to do so. I did not wish to do so. If nothing better had offered, I would have ridden a yearling calf against you, rather than give you the chance to crow over your victory! I mean your victory over the man, not the beast!"

"Then you bought the horse since Tornado

was rattled, Laughlin?"

"I have owned him only since last night,

judge."

"If you owned him only a single second before the race began, that is sufficient, Mr. Laughlin. There are no complaints of unfair riding or of foul play. Such being the case, we decide the gray horse wins the race and the

stakes dependent thereon!" There was hardly as loud or united cheering at this announcement as there would have been had Red Rover proved victorious, though there were many more voices lifted on high than would have been the case but for the suicidal

manner in which Basil Brock had ridden the

race.

With a lack of politeness such as he was seldom guilty of, Laughing Leo turned away without deigning to acknowledge this ovation by so much as a nod or a touch of his hat. His face was white and hard-set, looking more like that of a loser than the face of a man who had

just won a fortune. He uttered a few words into the eager ear of Spread Eagle Sam, and placed the gray horse in his particular charge. Grinning broadly, the

giant rancher made his way through the crowd, surrounded by his cowboys until an open space was reached. Then a wave of his hand sent the herders back to the younger member of the firm.

Queen Sate was one of the first to reach the racing or fighting me-" side of the victor, and her commanding glance, added to the adroit plunging of her spirited steed, quickly cleared an open space around

Laughing Leo.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Laughlin, on your victory—a victory none the less deserved from being plucked fairly out of the fire!" she cried in clear accents, distinctly audible to all; but her head bent lower as she rapidly added, aimost in a hiss: "You refused my horse, yet you took that of another woman-and she a squaw! I admire your taste, Leo Laughlin!"

"Thanks, Miss McAvoy," with a profound bow. "It is delightful to feel that you and I

are of the same mind for once!"

"You smiling demon! I'll get even with you for that, if it takes a lifetime!" flashed the Belle of the Range, abruptly wheeling her horse as

Basil Brock approached.

The owner of the B. B. Ranch was still dressed in his silken suit, and so far as the outward eye could see, had not taken the precaution of arming himself since. His face was hard set, pale as the heavy coating of tan would permit, his eyes glowing redly. But his voice was carefully schooled, cold and steady as he touched his cap to the victor.

"The judges have decided you the winner of

this race and stakes, Mr. Laughlin." "Then what are you kicking about?" sharply

interjected Leo.

"If you are a gentleman, you will hear me

out, sir. "I am a gentleman, though, if I had any doubts on that point, be sure I would not come to you for a decision."

"You wish to provoke a quarrel I see! Well-"

"I never quarrel save with my equals, Mr.

Brock."

There came a growing sound of indignation from the crowd that had gathered around the rivals. Laughing Leo was rapidly losing ground in their good will by his cold, insulting manner toward the man whom he had defeated, from whom he had just won an almost princely stake.

He could not help seeing this, but his eyes glittered with an almost fierce defiance as they glanced swiftly over the darkening faces. In that moment his new course was almost forgotten, and he was once more the reckless, yet devilishly cool sport of other days. All the stern restraint which he had bowed under for months past was cast to one side, and alone though he was for the time, in the midst of enemies both declared and secret, he even courted a collision.

"And I hold that no man is my equal as long

as he is in my debt."

Basil Brock turned a shade paler at this de-

liberate affront, but he managed to control his mad hatred for the time being. He said:

"No man knows better than you, Leo Laughlin, that I can pay my losses on this race thrice over. No gentleman would throw out such a base insinuation, but I'll meet you on your own ground. The title deeds to my ranch, with all its belongings, shall be placed in your hands before night falls, as security for what I owe you and your partner. Will that satisfy you?"

"If not, any or all of us will go on your bond, Brock!" impetuously cried one of his friends; and a general chorus from the majority of those

present confirmed his offer.

Laughing Leo showed his teeth in an icy smile as he bowed to the ranchers, collectively, but his voice was cold and hard as ever when he spoke again!

"I neither wish nor will I accept your security, gentlemen. You owe me nothing. Mr. Brock is my sole debtor, and I prefer his bare word to your united bonds; not that I love him so dearly, but because I would rather, ten times over, have him prove a defaulter than have that debt canceled on time."

"Do you mean to insult me, sir?" hoarsely de-

manded Basil Brock.

"I never insult a man who is under obliga-

tions to me," coldly.

"I came here to admit that you defeated my horse fairly," slowly uttered the owner of the B. B. Ranch, his very calmness telling how intense was his inward rage. "And I came to offer you another race on your own conditions, over your own distance, at your own time. If you are not a coward, as well as an escaped felon, you will accept!"

There was an instant division of the crowd, surging back to each side in order to leave an opening for the lead which they one and all expected would begin to fly as those cutting words rung forth. But Laughing Leo only smiled and

folded his arms across his bosom.

"You are needlessly alarmed, gentlemen," he said, with mocking coolness as he glanced over their startled ranks. "I never kill a debtor until after he ceases to be such. And Mr. Brock will have to hurl something more pointed than empty epithets at my head before he succeeds in making me break this unwritten rule. Besides —he knows that his life is sacred to me."

"The excuse of a coward, and therefore not surprising when coming from the lips of your mother's son!" viciously grated the owner of the B. B. Ranch. "If I can't crowd you into either

periously.

"Mebbe you'll do the next best thing, an' try to worry along with the ole man!" came a clear, mocking voice as Spread Eagle Sam pushed his way through the crowd and stood by the side of his Dandy Pard. "I ain't more'n a tit on a hog 'longside my pard, but I'll try to keep you from fallin' asleep over the lickin' ef you want to 'cept a substitute; be durned ef I don't, rattleweed!"

Another angry muttering from the crowd, and more than one hand dropped to the butt of revolver or haft of knife. It was clear that the owners of the Triangle Ranch were rapidly losing the new friends their victory had won them.

Spread Eagle Sam cast a swift glance over the darkening faces, a reckless laugh springing to his lips. Never before had he stopped to count odds, and he was too old to begin now.

But before the taunting words which rose in his throat could find birth, Laughing Leo tapped him on the shoulder, and Queen Sate urged her horse through the narrow lane, frowning im-

"For shame, gentlemen!" she cried, her voice ringing out sharp and clear, full of scathing rebuke. "Gentlemen? Dogentlemen make such a disgraceful exhibition of themselves in the presence of ladies? Do gentlemen snarl at each other like wild beasts over a carcass? For shame, I say again! I am ashamed of you all ashamed of myself in that I cannot deny belonging to the same race! Ashamed of you, Basil Brock, when I see you stooping so far below your rightful level. And I am even ashamed of those two-gentlemen," with a barely perceptible pause that lent a stinging meaning to her words as she flashed a look of scorn into the faces of the two pards, "whose conduct this day has better fitted them for the title of professional bullies!"

"Your humble servant, Miss McAvoy," gravely responded Laughing Leo, doffing his hat and gracefully bowing to the sarcastic beauty. "While deeply regretting having fallen under your displeasure, allow me to say in self-defense that there are times when a man has to use disagreeable truths as weapons against dishonest antagonists. Still, I pledge my word to deal as gently with the erring as possible, if only in hopes of regaining your good will."

"Come out o' that, ye vixen!" growled Finn McAvoy, crowding forward and grasping the head of his wayward daughter's horse, forcing her out of the crowd, angrily berating her as he led her to a distance.

Basil Brock took advantage of this diversion to beat a retreat, forcing himself to bide a more favorable opportunity for getting even with the

man whom he now hated a thousand times more intensely than before: and "that was needless," to use the vernacular.

The crowd fell back from the pards of the Triangle Ranch, leaving them alone, save for their small body-guard of cowboys, who seemed anything but at ease in the face of such overwhelming odds.

Laughing Leo was not content to retire even yet, though he might have done so with some degree of honor. He had suffered so long in silence, under insults, slights and wrongs, that now he had fairly broken the ice, he was resolved to leave no room for further misunderstanding.

With a swift motion he stepped a little in advance of his big pard, lifting a hand to command attention, his voice cold and clear:

"Gentlemen, if I have not too thoroughly disgusted you with my peculiar conduct, I wish you would listen to a few words of explanation before we part. While I don't mean to trample on the corns of any innocent man present, if I can help it, I'm going to give you words with the bark on!"

"If you must talk, why not answer Basil Brock?" derisively cried one of those who had

lost heavily on Red Rover.

"As he once said to me, I'll talk to him when he has paid his losses," was the sharp retort.

"Or, ef he's too hungry to wait that long, be durned ef the ole man won't try to swell up into a lunch big enough to keep him from starvin' to death!" grinned Spread Eagle Sam.

A backward wave of Laughing Leo's hand

silenced the big rancher.

"We came here, gentlemen, meaning and hoping to lead a quiet, peaceful life. To be civilized, even as we counted on being treated like white men. Instead—what was the result?

"Although not a man among you can point out a single act of incivility on our parts: though not one among you all can truthfully accuse us of double dealing, of cheat or fraud: though the bitterest enemy we have in all this. section cannot truthfully point out a single blot on our record, unless our winning this race today is regarded as one; you have treated us like outcasts! You have done all that men could do to ruin our business, to make our lives unbearable, to drive us from this section—and all for what?"

"Because we fancied your room more than your company!" cried one of the ranchers,

bluntly.

"And had not manhood enough to come out in plain words! Were too cowardly to say as much to our faces, but instead took to boycotting us, just as all other curs do!" Truly, Laughing Leo was keeping his word!

He was giving them "talk with the bark on,"

and that with a vengeance.

There was a stir among the crowd, and a few hands dropped to pistol butts; but with a besitating motion that hardly meant business. Perhaps their great superiority in point of numbers was the reason. Possibly it was because Laughing Leo made his title good by actually laughing in their faces as he confronted them, his empty hands folded across his swelling chest.

"You snarl and show your teeth, but you won't bite," be added, in cold, even tones that were not altogether free from contempt. "I am glad to see that you are not all lost to a sense of decency, and that gives me courage togo on."

"Let it give you a little smoother tongue, Mr. Laughlin," coldly interposed the judge who had announced his victory over Red Rover.

"If my words are rough-edged, blame those who have given me an excuse for uttering them, sir," retorted the young rancher. "Rough as they may be, they are smoother than velvet in comparison with the treatment we have received among a community composed, as we had a right to suppose, of gentlemen. If you doubt—listen yet a little further.

"Not a man present but knows how I tried to avoid making this race with Basil Brock. I tried to avoid it, until you began to sneer and whisper about cowardliness. Only to still your tongues and ward off a quarrel which could end

only in bloodshed, did I yield at last. "You may remember that I rode my buckskin, Mott, when I left you. I passed by the spring on my place, and stopped to water both horse and self, as is my custom. My horse drank from the trough which every man among you have utilized for the same purpose. Drank -and you will find his bloated carcass lying by that spring, with a notice 'poison' planted beside him."

This speech created a sensation among the crowd, and more than one face turned pale at thoughts of what might have been; for Laughing Leo had kept within bounds when he stated that every one present had used that same spring on occasions.

"Worse than that, gentlemen," he resumed. in the same cold, harsh tones: "Not only was the water in the trough poisoned, but the spring itself was poisoned! I dug up a shot-sack full of poison-arsenic, I think, though I am not yet positive: I will be able to say with certainty ere long-placed in the ground where all the water

had to soak through that sack before falling into the basin. Luckily I had not touched the water before I made the discovery, else you would not

be listening to my words now.

"You know what I found when I reached the ranch-Tornado driven mad by loco-weed that some cowardly hound had placed in his manger. You know how he died-a death which I would gladly have shared, if by that means I could have saved him.

"By spending the night working over him, with my pard, we managed to bring him here alive. Why? To silence the mouths of the demons who were ready and waiting to set up a howl about our drugging our horse as an excuse for drawing the stakes. How vilely they would have lied, you can see when I say that I meant to start in the race on his poor back! I did attempt to, but his death foiled my intention.

"Who poisoned my spring? Who was willing to risk poisoning one or a score of you, on the chance of murdering me? For if the poison was meant solely for my horse, why was it planted above the drinking-basin we all have used repeatedly? Who put that cursed rattle-weed in the trough from which Tornado ate his food?

Certainly not a friend.

"Gentlemen, I name no names. I accuse no one man of perpetrating these foul outrages, for I have no positive proof. If I suspect, I am not going to accuse until I have proof enough to convict the demon before a jury of his dearest friends. Then-I will punish!"

With almost savage intensity came the concluding words. And they caused more than one heart to thrill with awe among that crowd.

Before any one present could collect themselves sufficiently to speak, Laughing Leo coldly re-

sumed:

"You see now, gentlemen, why I saw fit to make use of rough words, as you chose to term them. You see now why I have acted, as I felt, as though the hand of every man was against my pard and self. Any man with a spark of manhood in his bosom would have done the same.

"Mind you, I am accusing nobody. I suspect, but until I can prove, I will never again mention these hellish deeds. In the mean time I will merely give this warning to those who can

best understand it.

"We are here to stay! Many as you are you are not strong enough to drive us from our ranch. You may kill, but you can't drive or frighten! We will exact our dues to the last hoof, even as we will pay all claims that may arise against us, though it takes the last horn. We do not ask you to be neighbors, more than in name. until the time comes when you see fit to ask that of us as a boon. Until then—gentlemen, we have the honor to bid you a polite goodday!"

Laughing Leo bowed low, then replaced his hat and turned to his faithful pard and his cowboys, cool and placid as though he had not just won a fortune and tongue-lashed a crowd.

"Amen! says the wusser an' lesser half o' the Triangle!" impulsively cried Spread Eagle Sam, with one of his inimitable screams that fairly rent the air. . "An' all them that don't like the tarms kin call on the ole man fer satisfaction! From fists to howltwisters, be durned ef it makes a diff o' bitterence to him! One or the whole kitan'-b'ilin'! An' the more there is, the better he'll be satisfied!"

"Simmer down, pard," smiled Laughing Leo, tapping the hide-hunter on his arm. "I reckon the gentlemen have got enough to think over as it is. One word with you, pard," he added, drawing Sam to one side. "You saw her? You gave her back the horse?"

"An' she skittered off, keepin' the timber in line with the crowd, like she was in a hurry to

git some'rs," grinned Sam. "An' you told her-"

"That you'd do the tellin' your own self, pard,"was the swift interposition. "An' blamed if I flon't lick the stuffiin' out o' you ef you don't make my promise good, the very fu'st chaince you kin git!"

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEREIN CICERO DELIVERS TWO LECTURES. In the deepening twilight Queen Sate was nervously pacing to and fro, her white brow corrugated, and something that was still hotter than impatience glowing in her great eyes.

It was the evening of the great race which had been attended by so many sensational features, but which, contrary to all expectations, had terminated without a blow being struck or a grain

of powder being burned.

Queen Sate was alone, and in a lonely spot, by the edge of the timber island where Cicero Boggs had fallen into the power of his enemies on the night last past. Though not so very far distant from the Emerald Ranch, all view of that building was cut off by the clump of timber intervening.

Queen Sate was alone, but she had an air as of expecting some one with the passage of each moment. She started at the lightest sound, flashing keen glances in whatever direction the

noise proceeded from. But with all this impatience, she was anything but delighted with the coming of the man who,

without the slightest warning sound, sprung before her from cover, and dropped to his knees with a passionate cry.

"Miss McAvoy-Queen Sate-angel of light and love! frown not, but look with pity and compassion on the poor wretch who flings his

heart in the dust at your feet!"

Instinctively the beautiful Amazon sprung back as this figure so unexpectedly fell at her feet, for right well she knew that the one for whom she was keeping this appointment would not dare act after such an insane fashion, and it was not without a second glance that she recognized the bold, yet humble intruder.

Even then she doubted the correctness of her sight and memory. Even then she kept that suppliant figure covered with the revolver which her practiced hand had so swiftly drawn from the belt at her waist. The metamorphosis was almost as great a surprise as the action.

"Are ye crazy, man?" she ejaculated, the "touch of the brogue" showing more plainly, as it ever did when either she or her father grew

excited or amazed.

"Crazy-mad, Queen Sate!" impetuously exclaimed the kneeling man, shuffling along on his knees and attempting to catch her unarmed hand between his. "Love-mad, and dying for one pitying word from those sweet lips! For one kind glance from those glorious eyes.

"Ye audacious villain, it's drinking ye've been, or ye'd niver dare utter such words to the like o' me! Is it a red squaw ye think me? Is it evening yerself to the daughter of Finn Mc-Avoy that ye'd be afther, ye drunken vagabond?" indignantly cried the Belle of the Range, with a deft movement of her wrist rapping him over the knuckles with the barrel of her revolver.

The suppliant was indeed none other than Red-foot, now clad in the gorgeous suit which he had obtained from Basil Brock for the express purpose of "going a-courting." Red-foot, looking a little the worse for the heavy stupor into which he, with Old John, had been thrown by the drugs of Meta-lupa in order that she might carry out her desperate resolve, taken just after hearing her brother tell his story of the locoed racer.

But Red-foot in name only; in name and reputation. The bright-hued moccasins which had first fastened that name upon him, were cast aside in favor of a pair of boots. The rags and blanket were supplanted by gold-laced finery. The brick-red hue of his face even seemed many shades lighter, perhaps because he had literally followed the sarcastic advice of Basıl Brock and risked his health in a copious bath!

He sprung to his feet as that sharp stroke sent a thrill of pain up his arm, but never flinched as Queen Sate stepped sharply back, her pistol-hand rising and the weapon covering his heart. Instead, one finger tapped his swelling bosom as

though to help her bullet home.

"It is here, Queen Sate-right here the heart that beats so full of love for you!" he uttered, his voice choking with his mad passion. "Look into my face; it is the face of a man whose birth is at least the equal of any gentleman on the range!"

"You—a dirthy vagabond of a red-skin!" "There is not a drop of red blood flowing in my veins! I am white!—white and free-born, Queen Sate!" impetuously cried Red-foot, flinging back his head with real or assumed proudness. "Look once more: am I red? Is my

tongue that of an Indian?" "So much the more shame on you, then!" laughed Queen Sate, her red lips curling with scornful amusement. "Ye've looked and acted the vagabond too long for a wash to cl'ane ye up. You've been the slave and dirthy-worker of Basil Brock too long to blot out the record so aisily. An' ye've been kis ing the bottle too close this day for me to punish as ye're impudence richly desarves! But don't push forbearance too far, ye villain! Take to yer heels an' slink back to the kennel where ye're most at home, befoore I forget that I'm a leddy an' send ye howling to the Ould Boy wid a bullet t'rough the empty skull av yez! Git!"

Not elegant. Hardly ladylike, or such speech as one would expect from a beautiful woman. But decidedly convincing, even to one as near

mad with love as this poor devil.

Red-foot knew then how utterly he had befooled himself when he counted on winning this Amazon by a display of fine clothes and finer words; when he had high hopes of working on her romantic vein by declaring his high birth and endle's riches, winding up with tearing off the mask he had worn so long-solely with the purpose of winning her love for himself, the man, not the rank and riches with which he was now ready to smother her.

Even a purblind lover could not mistake her utter contempt for him, both as man and suitor. And with a grating curse he sprung upon the woman, wresting the pistol from her careless grasp, casting it far away as he pinioned her arms, one hand clasped firmly over her lips.

"I wanted to win you by fair means, my beauty!" he grated viciously. "But win and wear you I will, by foul-"

Once more Red-foot was doomed to bitter disappointment.

A dark figure leaped out of the undergrowth, alighting close beside the rufflan and his vainly struggling captive. One strong hand caught him by the throat, only to destroy that clutch by a sledge-bammer blow from the other, tightly clinched, which hurled Red-foot endlong a dozen feet away, stunned and helpless for the moment.

With cat-like activity the new-comer leaped after, stripping the impetuous wooer of every weapon, and using his own belt to fasten both

hands behind his back.

Queen Sate uttered a low, gasping cry as she stared at the figure of the man whose coming had been so opportune. And as he turned from his captive, she shrunk back, pale as a ghost, trembling in every limb as she fully recognized Cicero Boggs!

"Calm yourself, I beg of you, my dear Miss McAvoy," came gently, soothingly from his smiling lips. "The impudent varlet is past doing any one harm, and I promise you he shall most humbly beg your pardon for any fright he may have caused you."

"You-Wirt Dalton!" panted Queen Sate, mechanically feeling for a weapon, the horror and dread deepening in her eyes and face.

"Cicero Boggs, ma'am, at your service," was the quick response, as the "tenderfoot" stepped closer to her side, with anything but rancor or menace in his voice or face. "The same whom you treated so generously yesterday. The same whom you so kindly warned of dange last night. I am delighted to be enabled to even partly repay that courtesy so soon!"

Queen Sate rather looked for angry repreach, if nothing more pointed, and shrunk still further away, shiveringly. Cicero Boggs saw this, and after a quick glance toward the faintly moaning Red-foot, who was just beginning to recover from that master blow, he hurriedly uttered:

"You have nothing to fear from me, Miss McAvoy. On my honor as a man I assure you of this. But I beg of you to wait here until I have read this rascally fellow a little lesson. I would like to have just a friendly word or two with you before we part again."

"Yet-you know-" faltered Queen Sate, for once fairly cowed by this unexpected en-

counter.

"Nothing to make you shiver and shrink away from me, Miss McAvoy," was the quick interposition. "Will you grant me a brief interview?"

He spoke more like a suppliant than a man who held her good name, if not her life or liberty in his hands. Queen Sate felt this, and though it by no means lessened her uneasiness on one score, it did partially restore her usual courage.

"You have the right to order-"

"Instead of which I beg a favor," Cicero Boggs interposed, one finger touching his lips as he glanced quickly in the direction of the gayly clad red-skin, who was beginning to struggle to his feet.

A strong hand assisted Red-foot in this, and the same hand twisted him around until his livid face confronted both his captor and the lady whom he thought to win, by foul means if not by fair.

"I'll drain your heart, curse you!" he snarled, vainly striving to free his hands. "You struck

"Just a tap to arrest your attention, my dear fellow," purred Cicero Boggs, with the blandest smile imaginable. "You were so busy that I had to touch you, though I wish I had had an old pair of gloves on! You scoundrel!" with an abrupt change of face and tones, his strong hand pushing Red-foot nearer to Queen Sate and forcing him to his knees at her feet, despite his struggles. "Beg pardon of the lady for your worse than brutish conduct! Beg, I say, or I'll twist the head off your shoulders!"

Bold though he might have been in some respects, and under more favorable conditions, Red-foot was thoroughly cowed now. He felt that he was in the hands of his master. That terrible grip on his neck told him that this man could carry his threat into execution, should he try. And something added that he would make that attempt, too, in case of obstinate refusal. In mumbling accents—the words he could

scarcely recognize himself—he obeyed, shivering like a leaf in the hands of his master.

"That is enough, Mr.—Boggs," faltered Queen Sate, shrinking back from what, in her usual high spirits, she would have regarded as a jolly lark and the choicest of sports. "He is hardly accountable-drunk, no doubt. And he is only a half-crazy Indian vagabond!"

"I am white as-"

The fingers of Cicero Boggs shut off his bot words and his wind as well. The same mighty grip lifted him to his feet and wheeled him about. And then a foot lifted him clear of the ground and sent him reeling forward along the edge of the underbrush.

"It hurts my feelings almost as much as it can yours, my dear son of the mighty forest," blandly uttered Cicero Boggs, as his foot sent the howling wretch still further ahead. "But I'm a slave to duty-a meek and obedient martyr to the calls of justice. Every admonition which I give and you receive, causes my poor

heart to fairly overflow with pity and regret that a fellow of your truly admirable points and noble top-loftiness should stoop so low as to become the football of fate, as personified in the

person of yours truly."

Each sentence was punctuated, as it were, by a tremendous kick, the deft hand of the speaker restoring Red-foot's balance whenever that was too badly destroyed. And his voice was still raised in reading this unique lecture to Red-foot when they faded from sight of Queen Sate. But not for long.

With a tremendous kick that hurled Red-foot forward on his face, Cicero Boggs darted into the timber and quickly returned with a horse, upon whose back he flung the groaning, battered wretch, bidding him hang on tight. Then a vigorous slap on the animal's haunch sent him off at full speed through the deepening twilight.

Mild and placid as though simply out for a lazy stroll in the pleasant evening, Cicero Boggs returned to the Belle of the Range, who was

strangely subdued and ill at ease.

Cicero Boggs saw this, and his beaming smile disappeared as he paused before her, doffing his hat and holding it with both hands before her breast. And it was in the words and tone of a suppliant, rather than those of a master, that he addressed her:

"Miss McAvoy, can you ever pardon a miserable wretch who has sinned so awfully against hospitality? May I speak a word in defense of my seemingly inexcusable conduct?"

"You have the power-do not press it too far!" muttered Queen Sate, with a glow in her large eyes that told of gathering courage.

"I am the most wretched of men, dear ma'am," with increased humility in face and tones. "You must have been terribly shocked at my mysterious disappearance this morning, when I should have appeared at your hospitable board, but—with shame and anguish I confess it!—I am a somnambulist, and in my slumbers I must have got up and dropped out of the window, to wander far away through the night, and-"

Queen Sate interrupted him with a passionate gesture, her hard, unnatural tones showing how severely she felt this, as she considered it, sneer-

ing mockery.

"Why talk like that, you bloodhound? Why keep up such a miserable pretense, when you know as well as I do that you came to our ranch as a bloodhound, scenting victims? When you know that you dogged me out here, last night, in hopes of twisting a repe to put about my neck! But I foiled you then, and I may foil you again, despite your escape from the men in whose charge I placed you!"

"Miss McAvoy, I am glad that you have spoken so plainly, since now I feel at liberty to do the same," was the grave response. "I knew that you were more or less deeply concerned in my capture, last night, but I hold no grudge. I don't even ask how you threw dust

in my eyes."

"It was my voice you heard, even as it was my figure which you dogged from the house," recklessly admitted Queen Sate. "When you were captured, I hoped to still your tongue should you ever escape. I changed clothes with Pretty Poll, who could imitate my voice perfectly."

"So I half-helieved, but was not sure," laughed Cicero Boggs, as he gently took her hand between his, holding it closely despite her involuntary effort to free it. "And now, knowing all this, Miss McAvoy, I earnestly beg of you to give me shelter for this night beneath your roof. If you will, I promise, on honor, to not walk again in my sleep."

Queen Sate stared at him with wide-open eyes, unable to comprehend what he would gain by this strange course. Cicero Boggs laughed softly; then meeting her eye to eye, grave and gen-

tle, he added:

"It is hard for you to give me credit for being a man, instead of the bloodhound you it would be impossible to match or duplicate in have so often called me; but the time will come, I sincerely trust, when you will be more generous. I am plotting naught against you or yours, Miss McAvoy. I have no hard feelings for what is past. If I have any regret, it is that you have permitted yourself to become entangled in what may prove a death-trap to all who refuse to take timely warning. May I speak still more plainly?"

There was no reply in words, but Queen Sate vielded to the gentle force which led her away from the timber and in the direction of the Emerald Ranch. And as they walked, Cicero

Boggs talked on.

"You were right in calling me a detective, Miss McAvoy, but I came to this section on business wholly unconnected with you or yours. I am hunting for a criminal known as Briscoe Davidson, who has long been wanted for murder. Yet it is true about the Parkindale fortune, though I took up that simply as a mask to my real purpose.

"You see, I am frank with you, at last. Do

you know why?" Queen Sate shook her head in the negative. "Because I wish you to trust me wholly in return. Do not misunderstand me, dear girl," as she shrunk away from his side. "I have nothing to do with the party that is running off

stock here, and among whom I fear you number some dear friends. I will neither interfere with them nor utter a word that can cause them trouble, bloodhound though you have called me. Shall I tell you why?"

"If—if you wish," faintly murmured Queen Sate, forced to cling to his strong arm to steady

her steps.

"Because I have taken a deep interest in you, Sarah McAvoy," was the low, earnest response. "Because I wish to give you time to realize whither your footsteps are trending-time to forever break off all such perilous connections. For, sooner or later, the band must come to grief. You are smart enough to know this, Queen Sate! Does it not always turn out so? Are not the wages of sin ever the same?"

With a choking sob Queen Sate drew away her hand and faced the detective, her eyes flashing with strangely mingled emotions, ber face white as that of a corpse, her voice choked and

unnatural as she said:

"Why do you talk like this to me? You know I thrust you into danger, although I knew that the odds were frightfully against your ever escaping with life! You know that I am a member of this league, and therefore a criminal, liable to arrest as such! Why do you not arrest me? You are playing with me as a cat plays with a mouse—you demon!"

Gravely Cicero Boggs confronted her as she spoke. Gravely he listened to her passionate, almost incoherent speech. But when her voice choked so that she was forced to pause and gasp for breath, he once more took her hands between his, speaking earnestly, tenderly:

"You are far more sinned against than sinning. It would be worse than murder to arrest you on your own confession: for that would forever destroy your soul by covering it with shame and degradation in your eyes, at least, even should you escape scot-free. That is one of my reasons, Queen Sate," and his voice grew more musical than grave, a smile lighting up his strong features, rendering them very unlike the same when belonging to Cicero Boggs. "Shall I tell you another?"

There was silence, and that, as everybody knows, is supposed to give consent. So Cicero

Boggs interpreted it, and added:

"Because I begin to feel the need of a nurse and guardian, dear Miss McAvoy, to cure me of this atrocious habit of somnambulism! And I thought that possibly I might, in time, persuade you to-"

proudly.

"To introduce me to some person who would agree to take that vast responsibility upon her shoulders," blandly added Cicero Boggs, just as though these were the words upon his lips in the first place. "And now, may I repeat my request for a night's lodging, dear Miss McAvoy?" "If you dare risk it—yes!" was the cold re-

sponse.

CHAPTER XVII. A LIVING AVALANCHE.

THE day following that on which Red Rover was defeated by the "Gray Ghost," as that worthy equine was almost universally dubbed, was a very busy one to all on the Triangle Ranch.

With the first streak of dawn a representative of the B. B. Ranch called there, gravely saluting Laughing Leo and Spread Eagle Sam as the partners hastened to answer his summons. Briefly the man introduced himself, though this was not the first time by many that they had met. Stiffly he acknowledged their cordial greetings, then at once settled down to business.

"Mr. Basil Brock sends me to learn the exact number of head, big and little, old and young, horses, mules, cattle, sheep, hogs-in one word to take a complete census of the Triangle Ranch, only excluding the human stock: those he says this region."

"I am delighted to see that your master has at least one qualification of an honest man left -candor," blandly bowed Laughing Leo. "Still, it pains me that he should feel compelled to thus publicly confess his inferiority; and isn't it rather hard on you poor devils who are un-

lucky enough to serve under him?"

The fellow flushed hotly, and an angry glitter came into his eyes at this adroit twisting of what he had thought would prove a rankling thorn in the ribs of these conceited interlopers. But Spread Eagle Sam was standing close to him, with a fist tightly clinched and looking big and hard enough to knock down a bull, let alone a man. And after one uneasy gulp, the envoy from the B. B. Ranch concluded to pass the gilded insult by without further notice.

He shortly explained that the original bet of five hundred head of market steers were already on the way to Triangle Ranch. That the herders were busily rounding up another five hundred head, which would follow in a very short time, accompanied by Basil Brock in person, who would then expect to receive a full and complete inventory of all the stock owned by the Triangle firm.

"He bade me add that the men in his employ, not actually engaged in transferring these thou-

ALLER STATE OF THE PARTY OF THE

sand head to you, gentlemen, would be busily? engaged in collecting his cattle, from which would be picked the remnant necessary to cancel his losses of yesterday. He is doubly anxious to have the matter settled, so that, his hands free, you can have no further excuse for refusing him satisfaction."

"Did Mr. Basil Brock bid you tell me this?" The overseer flushed anew. He could not say in so many words that his employer had made any such request. In his anger and his hatred for the new firm, for he had lost considerable of his savings by backing Red Rover, he had been led on to say more than he could fairly back up

with proof.

"Because, if he did, you may go back the way you came and give your master a lesson in good manners. When he has a favor to beg, let him come, hat in hand and ask it by word of mouth. And if he really expects a gentleman to meet him as you hint, bid him first cleanse his hands of poison-bid him make sure the scent of loco-weed does not hang too strongly about his person. Then-I'll see him!"

"You talk mighty brash," growled the overseer, frowning blackly. "I am alone among

your crowd, but-"

"Keep a half-way civil tongue in your head, my dear sir, and you are as safe here as you would be on the B. B. Ranch," coolly interposed. Laughing Leo. "But when you set out to crack the whip over us, don't begin to whine if the tip of a cracker happens to touch you to the quick. It is not like a man—and in decent company for a year or so, you would not make such a poor shadow of a man, after all!"

If the lesson read the overseer was a trifle sharp, he knew that it was not wholly unprovoked, and had sense enough left to see that his most sensible action would be to adopt another course altogether. This he did, sticking closely to business, acting as one gentleman among his equals, and by the time the first installment of cattle reached the Triangle Ranch, he was put wholly at his ease by the frank geniality of the man whom he had come there prepared to in-

sult. Still, he found that Laughing Leo was "all business." That he was determined to exact his

winnings to the very last item.

Since the death of Tornado, Leo Laughlin had done much steady thinking, and with the aid of Spread Eagle Sam in recalling all that they had been called upon to suffer and put up with since first coming to that section, rejecting all which "Sir!" cried Queen Sate, drawing back they could not almost positively trace back to the agency of Basil Brock, he had conquered much of that morbid sentiment which caused him to shrink from resenting even an insult from the son of the man who had fallen by the hand of his mother.

He felt convinced that Basil Brock had caused the poisoning of the spring, and the drugging of Tornado with the infernal loco-weed. And soberreflection told him that such an evil wretch was deserving of no more mercy than he himself had

showed.

"Double the amount would not pay for poor Tornado's death by such atrocious means," he said, sternly.

"Make him pay all that, an' then take the rest out o' his hide, ef he comes struttin' 'round any more," grinned Sam, in grim delight at having at last fairly roused his Dandy Pard.

And so it was that Laughing Leo showed an almost miserly precision in making out his schedule, setting down every item, but obliging the B. B. overseer to do the same after actual inspection and counting. This was the more readily done coming so soon after the round-up, and from the fact that the partners had held their herds well in hand, ready for the worst in case the race should go against them.

The herd of five hundred was counted and receipted for, then put under the care of the cowboys, to be herded on the level before the ranch. where the second installment could be added to it when it arrived. This would save the trouble of looking for brands, and give no possible chance for disputes arising between the rivals.

It was well along in the afternoon when the second bunch of cattle arrived, Basil Brock himself accompanying them. He stiffly saluted his hated rival as he named the number of head, asking for an acknowledgment, or receipt for somany head on account.

"Certainly, when I am satisfied that there are just the number you represent, Mr. Brock," coldly bowed Laughlin. "Bid your men drive them past, and we will count them together."

Basil Brock turned fairly livid at this speech, for polite as were the tones, the suspicion con-

veyed was a bitter insult indeed. "If you insist, of course," he muttered,

hoarsely. "But between gentlemen, sir, it is: hardly customary to-" "I am dealing with you, Mr. Brock," curtly

interrupted Laughlin. "Do you dare to even insinuate that I am no

gentleman?"

"I never insinuate. Just now I am dealing with you as a man of business. If you don't admire my ways of doing business, you can refuse to pay your debts. Will you give your men the necessary orders, or am I to sue out papers in order to secure my rights?"

"You shall pay a dear price for this insult, Leo Laughlin!" grated Basil Brock as he spurred away to make the necessary arrangements.

"Bully fer you, pard!" chuckled Spread Eagle Sam, fairly boiling over with pure delight. "It does the old heart o' me good to see my pard o' the buffler range on top ag'in! Stick to him, lad! Ram him chuck full o' pins an' needles! Sprinkle him from top to toe with porkypine quills! Stuff prickly p'ars an' centypedes down his back, an' git part way even fer all the dirt he's made us eat while you was onder that durned hoodoo-spell! Good Lawd! I hain't hed so much fun sence you come an' cleaned us all out at the dug-out on the range!"

"It was a spell, I reckon, pard," faintly smiled Laughing Leo. "But the death of poor Tornado brushed it away. From this day on I'm going to spare no one who gets in my way."

It took time to count the herd, which proved to be a little over rather than under the stated number, and it was almost dark when the task was completed and the two bunches formed into one herd. And when Laughing Leo punctiliously noted down the exact number of head, marking them as "first class," handing the receipt to Basil Brock, the latter sneeringly demanded:

"The next time you will not be quite so ready to doubt the word of a gentleman, I'm think-

ing, Leo Laughlin!"

That depends on who claims the title, Basil Brock," was the cold retort. "While I deal with you, neither one side nor the other shall

take aught for granted." Basil Brock frowned and one hand instinctively dropped to the weapons at his waist. But he went no further. Possibly because he was not quite ready to give life for life: and Spread Eagle Sam was watching his every movement

with cat-like closeness. "As I am still your debtor to some extent, Mr. Laugalin, you are comparatively safe in uttering your vile insults. Make out your statement as soon as possible, and send it to me. I will have enough stock collected to wipe out the score, so far as your winnings go. As for the insults-when I am no longer your debtor, I'll

come to you for a final settlement!"

"Come with clean hands and a clear record, then, Basil Brock!" retorted Laughing Leo, for the first time that day showing anything like anger or excitement. "Come to me with proof that you are not a cowardly poisoner! Come prepared to defend yourself against the double charge of poisoning my spring and locoing my racer-or you'll come to be punished like a dogmangy, diseased, too utterly contemptible for aught but kicking off my premises!"

"You lie in your throat if you dare accuse me of this!" viciously grated the owner of the B. B.

Ranch, whipping forth a pistol.

Only to have it wrested from his hand by the swift grip of Spread Eagle Sam, who tossed the weapon far away, and would have followed it with the rancher himself, only for the quick interposition of his pard.

"Let him go, Ingalls!" he cried, sharply. "As yet his guilt is only suspected, not proven. When it is proved, I'll punish him, never fear!"

Basil Brock laughed hardly as he smoothed his

ruffled garments. "You shall answer for this with all the rest, Leopold Burvenich. To-morrow I will wipe out your claims, if I have to drive my entire herd over here and leave them for you to select from. And then-Ill kill you or be killed!"

Without another word or waiting for a reply, he turned and galloped away, closely followed

by his herders and overseer.

"Durn the horns!" chuckled Spread Eagle Sam, fairly beside himself with delight at the turn affairs had taken. "They're good enough when they ain't nothin' better, o' course, but I wouldn't give this fun fer all the horned critters as run this range from eend to eend an' back ag'in! Good Lawd! jes' to think how long a time we've lost through your bein' under that hoodoo spell, pard!"

Laughing Leo made no reply in words. His face was white and hard, and he did not look like a man who had gained a fortune and sweet

revenge all in a single day.

Spread Eagle Sam saw this, and his own countenance fell, but only for an instant. He was feeling too joyful to permit even a single cloud to gather, and coming closer to his Dandy Pard, he whispered:

"An' the hull of it come 'long o' that dainty little angel, pard! Say Heaven bless Ler, with

the ole man, won't ye?"

But Laughing Leo turned abruptly away without a word. Ingalls gazed after him, half-doubtingly, but

then his smile deepened into a laugh as he mut-

tered just above his breath:

"It'll come out jes' so-you mark my words! Pity she's red, but that won't count fer so mighty much ag'inst what she done! An' Injun or no Injun, she's as nigh bein' an angel as they make 'em nowadays! An' bein' a bit of a squaw, so to speak, she won't try to push the ole man out o' the nest-that's the best o' all!"

There was little prospect for sleep for those on The Triangle Ranch that night. The cattle received from Basil Brock, being on a new range

and under strange guards, were naturally restless, and to guard against anything like a stampede, the cowboys were directed to keep on the alert, ready to calm down any fresh uneasiness before it could turn to anything serious.

Both Laughing Leo and Spread Eagle Sam kept on the move through the first part of the night, though both were feeling the want of rest after the sleepless night they had spent over poor Tornado. And shortly after midnight, seeing that the cattle were calming down, they turned in close by, in their clothes, ready to to take saddle at the first alarm.

Despite the exciting and disturbing scenes which they had so recently gone through, both men fell as eep almost as soon as their heads touched their saddle-pillows, and slept heavily for some hours. Then—the earth seemed to tremble, the air to fill with a frightful tumult!

"Up, pard!" yelled Laughing Leo, leaping to his feet and then into the saddle of his horse which stood close by in readiness for just such an emergency as this. "A stampede!"

The warning was not needed, and Spread Eagle Sam was in the saddle almost as soon as his active pard. Nor were the words necessary. That it was a stampede, and no ordinary one,

was only too plain. The thousand head from the B. B. Ranch were tearing away at breakneck speed, bellowing madly, charging blindly, driven mad with fear of some description. Their hoofs rattled together like the crackling of a thousand rifles. Their united trampling fairly made the ground shake and tremble like an earthquake.

"To the right, Sam!" yelled Laughing Leo at the top of his voice as he steadied his frightened horse, then sent him to the left with a vigorous

application of his keen spurs.

If any further words were uttered, they never reached the ears of the giant rancher, for he was already dashing off, urging his big horse at top speed, knowing that nothing could be done until the head of the stampeding herd was reached.

But he required no instructions. He knew well enough that there was only one method of checking a stampede like this before complete exhaustion caused the frightened animals to drop in their tracks, dead or broken completely down. And that was to gain their head, and with voice, whip, and crowding, force the leaders to gradually turn to the right or left from a direct course, keepi g this up until they were fairly "milled," or revolving in a circle.

"Some o' that devil's work," the giant rancher horse on at top speed, skirting the rear of the herd. "That's why he was so keerful to take a receipt afore the hull debt was paid! But we'll

fool him-fool him bad!"

As he passed by several of the cowboys, who seemed startled into confusion by the unexpected break, he shouted for them to come on and imitate him. And little by little he gained on the crowding, bellowing mass, whose speed was thus hampered. And as he dashed along, his whip played with terrible force in the fronts of all the cattle he could reach from the saddle, each blow swinging round from the front, blinding as it fell, sensibly checking the speed of those singled out.

Still on, his clear voice raised to the top notes in a song without words, for right well he knew that nothing is more calming or reassuring to a stampeding herd than the human voice.

Still on, until he could distinguish the front of the stampede. Still on, keeping closely to the skirts, reckless of the keen horns that were more than once swung viciously out toward himself and horse. Still on, singing more loudly, swinging his cruel whip with tireless energy and precision, crowding the cattle to the left, knowing that only by such means could he hope to succeed.

For the moment he had forgotten all about his Dandy Pard, who had ridden off on the opposite flank. But now-a thrill of horror ran through his giant frame as he caught sight of a mounted figure racing along in front of that living avalanche-not trying to turn the leaders, but rather as though fleeing for dear lifeas though fearing to be overtaken and ground to pomace beneath those thousands of hoofs!

"Pard! God above! his critter is limpin'!" gasped Spread Eagle Sam, his face white as that of a corpse, his great eyes almost starting from their sockets, unutterable horror in the gasping words that broke from his choking throat.

By the dim moonlight he could distinguish this: could see the rider, leaning far forward in the saddle, looking back at the coming ava-

lanche as though in a speechless fear! And more—he could see that the horse was losing ground with each painful bound! Scarce twenty yards divided him and the leading cattle! Only a minute more of life-only a minute between him and the most frightful of all deaths!

For a single breath Spread Eagle Sam was paralyzed with horror, but then his voice rose in a maddened roar of mingled horror and savage rage—all the more fierce because he felt only too plainly his utter inability to give suc-

He dropped his whip and drew his pistols, pressing hard upon the routing steers, sending shot after shot at the leaders, bringing one after another in a heap to the ground for their fellows. to leap or stumble over. Still closer he pressed as his pistols rapidly emptied themselves, heeding not his own danger, holding his terrified. horse by the crushing pressure of his knees from flinching, until-

With a shriek of horror the doomed man felt his crippled horse stumble and fall! With a flying leap he shot over its head, only to roll over and over with helpless ankle. And then-

On thundered the living avalanche, over the fallen horse and its rider! On-unheeding the crackling of bones-the bloody spray that answered the stroke of their terrible hoofs!-

Spread Eagle Sam saw the rider fallsaw the maddened cattle plunge blindly over him—then his own horse went down with a horn buried deep behind its shoulder, hurling him half a dozen yards away. He struck fairly on his feet, knife in hand, and slashing like a madman as the cattle came on. He was struck by a grisly front, and knocked to one side—then heknew nothing more until the herd rushed past...

Bruised, ragged, bleeding, he crawled forward. to the spot where the horse and rider had fallen, and paused beside the horrible blotch that alone marked where a human life had gone out, his eyes too full of tears to distinguish aught more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR A PARENT'S SIN.

LAUGHING LEO had no thought of personal danger as he dashed off at the top of his horse's: speed, leaning to the left, he could scarcely have told why, for it was certainly a thing he would never have done had he paused to take a second thought. Comparatively slight as was his experience in the cattle business, he would have known better than to divide his force thus, for in "milling" a stampede the work can be done only from one side.

But a man is hardly ever at his best or keenest when suddenly awakened from a sound slumber in such a manner as this, and Laughing Leo fell. into a very natural mistake, after all.

His only thought was to skirt the frightened herd and check their mad career after some fashion, he scarcely knew or tried to think how during those first few moments.

Urging his good horse on with voice and spur he quickly came up with the rear of the herd. but as his keen gaze roved over them, he saw grated between his teeth as he urged his good that he could do nothing from that position, and wheeled his horse still further to the left, dashing along through the dense clouds of dust cast on the night air by the thousands of clattering hoofs.

> He had covered nearly a mile after this fashion, and was getting fairly well along the flank of the stampede, when he distinguished the clump of timber which told him just how far he had come in that mad, headlong race.

> The frightened cattle were sweeping close by the edge of this, and though it did occur to him that, possibly, he would be safer in swinging around this obstruction. Laughing Leo followed close to the line of trees and undergrowth, his: voice lifted in song which seems so utterly out of place in such a thrilling, nightmare scene, but which has been proved the wisest course in such an emergency. And Laughirg Leo never threw more energy into a love song than he did on this occasion, his bell-like notes rising high at ove even the thunder of hoofs and the savage bellowing.

> Better for him had be ridden on in silence for a short distance further; and yet—it was so-

fated.

He caught sight of several mounted figures near the grove, and naturally took them for some of his cowboys whom he had left on guard over the newly acquired herd. He waved his: hand toward them, crying:

"Follow me, my lads! we'll get them yet!" Even as the words passed his lips the shadowy figures dashed out to meet him, and before he could discover his mistake, the foul deed was done-the noose of a lasso closed around his shoulders, dragging him out of the saddle and hurling him to the ground with stunning force. And, though he knew it not, other lariats caught and held his horse.

Amid the still swirling dust, a horseman leaped to the ground and clutched the young rancher with a grip that would have bothered an entirely uninjured man to cope successfully with. Clutched and held him until a hesty inspection assured him that there was no fear of escape. Until an entirely different fear assailed him.

"Ten thousand curses!" he cried in hoarse, savage tones. "He's dead! Dead-and never knew whose band laid him low!"

Just how long his insensibility lasted, Laughing Leo never knew with anything like certainty. He was not killed by his fall, though sorely bruised and terribly shocked. He had even a faint, dreamy consciousness of being borne through the night air, bound to a saddle and surrounded by laughing, jeering phantems. Butwho these phantoms really were, or whither here was being conveyed, he could not have told.

When the stupor passed away from his brain, and his eyes opened to the light, he stared dizzily about him, feeling like one suddenly wakened

from some frightful dream.

He was in a but of some sort, dimly illumined by the red light of a smoldering fire in one end of the room. He could just distinguish the bowed figure of a man squatting before the coals. faint smoke-wreaths curling around his bare head. Of another form lying stretched on the floor, dead, drunk or sleeping.

He strove to rise to his feet, gasping as if for the lack of fresh air, but in vain. He could not control his limbs. They seemed made of lead, they felt so strangely heavy and inert. He glanced down at them, to see—were those ropes

about his ankles?

He strove to cry aloud, and doubtless be did make some sound, even though his own ears failed to detect it, for the two figures leaped up and one of them flung a dirty, smoky blanket over his head, holding it firmly in place while the other man deftly wrapped a rope about it, effectually blinding the young rancher.

"Who are you? Where am I? What does Nothing could so surely prove that he felt his

it mean?"

Laughing Leo could scarcely recognize his own voice, though he knew he was speaking. The sense of outrage lent him strength, and he strove to burst his bonds, to cast off that suffocating blanket, to leap upon these dastardly enemies and punish them for their deeds, even though death should come to himself the next moment.

But all in vain. That horrible, sickening sensation came over him again, and he felt his

senses reeling—reeling—

It was hours later when he once more began to hear sounds about him. To catch the sound of human voices, to feel the touch of hands and hear the shuffling of human footsteps. Yet this was all. Sight was still denied him, and for a few dizzy moments be fancied he had gone blind. But then he knew a bandage of some sort was covering his eyes; not that heavy, dirty, smoky blanket, for he could breathe, without oppression, and as he rolled his eyeballs downward, he could catch just a gleam of light along his mose.

Then—a pungent, yet not disagreeable smoke filled his nostrils, choking and sending him off into a spasm of coughing, amidst which he dis-

tinguished the words:

"You see-brain grow clear mighty quick, now! Heap good medicine-wake up dead man,

"most!"

"I'll break your infernal back if you lie to me!" snarled another voice—a voice that rung like a death-knell through the brain of the captive—a voice that he recognized on the instant.

"Basil Brock—you treacherous cur!"

Sharp and explosive came the words from the lips of the blinded captive, and a sharp oath

told how hard they hit the mark.

For a brief space there was silence. Laughing Leo, his brain cleared as though by magic, divined the truth of the situation, and knew that at last he had fallen into the hands of the being who hated him worse than death. Knew that he owed his captivity to Basil Brock. Knew that he could hope for nothing more merciful than death, now that he had involuntarily bestrayed his knowledge.

And then he resolved to die, if die he must, bearding and defying his relentless enemy. He would cheat him of part of his revenge!

"Are you too big a coward, Basil Brock, to meet the eyes of a man?" he cried, his voice fairly ringing with scorn. "Must you do muroder, yet fear to look your enemy in the faceand his limbs bound with ropes strong enough to hold a grizzly bear?"

"'E crazy critter, it ain't no Basil Brock that's ketched ye now!" came a deep, grating voice in

response.

"You are not Basil Brock, but Basil Brock is in this room, too cowardly to speak again!" sharply retorted Laughing Leo, feeling almost his usual self again, in all but freedom of limb.

Oh, if he had his liberty for even a single minute! No matter the number of his enemies. No matter his unarmed state. His hands would be equal to the occasion—and he would not die wholly unavenged!

Again a brief silence. Then a short, ugly laugh broke the stillness, followed by the unmistakable tones of Basil Brock, as the bandage was rudely jerked from the eyes of the captive

rancher. "If you will have it so-look!" grated the owner of the B. B. Ranch, bending over his captive, his dark eyes fairly flashing fire, keen and venomous as the glare of an enraged serpent. "And know that your ears have pronounced your doom! Know that in recognizing my voice, you have doomed yourself to death beyond all hope of escape!"

Laughing Leo glanced swiftly, comprehensively about him, taking note of all that the room contained. He saw two stout fellows besides Basil Brock, their faces blackened and covered to the chin with rude masks, their garments being plainly arranged with an eye to avoiding recognition that might prove awkward when the day of settlement should arrive. He

saw that bowed figure again, and a strange thrill ran through his veins as he felt that it must be that of Old John—the father of Redfoot and Meta-lupa!

Meta-lupa! Where was she? Surely she could have had no hand or part in this fresh out-

rage?

The wild fancy was banished as quickly as it flashed across bis brain, and then Laughing Leo gazed straight into the blazing eyes of his vicious enemy, a cold, sneering laugh parting his lips and preceding the words:

"Can you never open your lips without lying, you cowardly cur? I have doomed myself! And, no doubt, you only had me brought herefor such a cur would never dare come even within yelping distance of a free-handed man!simply to shake hands and turn me loose again! You did not mean to murder me in bonds-bah!" and in the extremity of his reckless hatred, Laughing Leo spat full into that bronzed face!

Nothing could have more clearly shown how utterly he had lost all hope of escaping with life.

fate was irretrievably sealed.

Basil Brock started back with a choking cry, one hand whipping a knife from his belt. For an instant the life of Laughing Leo hung trembling in the balance. None knew this better than he, yet he never flinched, never removed his blazing eyes from the livid face of his enemy, though a low, mocking laugh parted his red

For one instant—then Basil Brock hissed out a savage oath as he flung the glittering weapon over his shoulder, narrowly missing one of his disguised allies. And, as though to the more certainly resist temptation, the owner of the B. B, Ranch unbuckled his belt and tossed it to one of the men.

Wiping his face he turned again to his captive, his voice cold as ice, his words even and meas-

ured:

"You think to make me kill you at a single blow, Leopold Burvenich, and thus rob death of half its terrors—thus cheat my vengeance of half its sweetness! But you don't know me yet!"

"Do I not?" coldly retorted the prisoner. "Poisoner of springs! Drugger of horses! Stampeder of cattle! Murderer at heart, though you are by far too great a coward to strike an open blow-too currish to confront or threaten a man without bonds on his limbs! Not know you? I know you only too well! And I am not alone in that knowledge. Spread Eagle Sam knows you just as well-and you will know him far better than you do at this moment, you

Basil Brock laughed harshly, seeming to enjoy this fierce tirade. It proved that his hated enemy could feel, and feel acutely, even though a spice of fear seemed lacking,

Laughing Leo rightly read his feelings, and stopped short. If this sort of retort pleased the

rascal, he should have no more of it. Basil Brock squatted down before his captive; his face hard and merciless, his eyes glow-

ing redly, his voice bitter as aloes. "Even had I been the author of all you charge me with, Laughing Leo, alias Leopold Burvenich, ex-thief, gambler, foot pad, road-agent, and son of that fiend, the She Wolf! Even if I had done all you hint, still it would be but a drop in the bucket of the bitter black debt I owe you! But I deny all you charge, save capturing and bringing you here for a final settlement."

"Another lie-but go on. Do not let me interrupt you, dear neighbor," softly purred the

young rancher, smiling blandly.

A flash of rage shot across the bronzed face of his captor, and Laughlin laughed anew as he saw how admirably he had read his foe, how much more unpalatable was this cool indifference than his former hot denunciation.

"You play it well, Laughing Leo," snarled Basil Brock, showing his teeth viciously, "but I'll shake your nerve, despite you! I'll make you cringe and cower, make you beg and whine for mercy before I am done with you! But first, let me uncover the black past, and show you just why I have been your enemy."

"Suit yourself, dear lad," drawled Laughing Leo, with a lazy yawn that looked true as nature itself. "If it pleases you, I can bear it. But wouldn't it look a little more filial were you to permit the once gallant and honored Major Wesley Kimball, of the regular service, to rest quiet and undisturbed in his grave?"

"You know-you know who I am?" panted Basil Brock, fairly livid with intense rage. "The un worthy son of a once worthy father. He is dead and buried. It is not for my hands

to open that grave and dishonor his corpse." Gravely, solemnly came these words. Without a trace of sneering. With even a touch of

sadness that was plainly genuine. But the words seemed to set Basil Brock fairly wild with rage and lust of vengeance. He dashed his clinched fists into the calm face before him, cutting the white skin and sending the red blood trickling down in little rills. He tore blindly at his waist, and had a weapon met his hands at that moment, Laughing Leo would

surely have died.

"That is like you, coward!" coldly uttered the captive, never flinching, never removing his blazing eyes from the rage-distorted face of his enemy. "Keep on. My hands are bound. I cannot strike you back in return. There is no danger to cow you. Strike-if you dare!"

Those cuttingly scornful words seemed to restore the madman to his senses. He whipped his hands behind him. He sprung to his feet and strode over to where his knife was still sticking in the wall, where he had hurled it a short time before. He sprung back and brought the glittering weapon down, its point directed toward the heart of his helplessly bound prisoner —only to check the weapon before it touched its seeming mark. And a low, harsh laugh broke from his livid lips.

"You see, Leopold Burvenich?" he said, sharply. "You see how little your taunts affect me? I can control my hatred, even when my blade is at your heart! Bah!" with a vicious clicking of his strong teeth. "Did you think to escape me so easily? Did you think to settle the black score with so speedy and painless a death? You poor fool!"

"Not so poor by fifteen hundred head as I was yesterday." laughed the captive, a mocking light dancing in his eyes, a smile playing over his blood-marked face.

"You are lying, now," harshly laughed Basil Brock. "One thousand head, for which I hold your receipt, are killed or crippled in a stampede which my brain arranged, my money paid for! Your ranch is in ashes, your herds astray, your giant pard—go ask the coyotes!"

"I'll ask your carcass, shortly after my pard

meets you, rather."

Could nothing shake the nerve of this smiling demon? Basil Brock asked himself this, as he with difficulty smothered his hot disappointment. He had counted so much on this

"That meeting will never take place this side the infernal regions, Leopold Burvenich, so you may witness it, after all," he managed to utter without too plainly betraying his disappointment. "Your partner has gone on in advance, but he will not have to wait long before the firm which held the Triangle Ranch here on earth, can be still a firm, in Tophet!

"But before I send you over the range, a few words—confessions, if you like the term better. want you to know all that you owe me, and

just what for.

"You are right. I am the son of Major Wesley Kimball, the man whom your mother, the She Wolf killed. How and why she killed him, does not matter, though if we were alone—never mind," with a dark frown toward his disguised men, who mechanically started toward the door. "Keep your places, fellows. I want you to see how completely I can break down the will of this pretender!"

"Sit down, poor devils," softly uttered Lightning Leo, in a voice that was fairly overflowing with pity. "You will need all the rest you can get, unless your master is lying-according to

custom!"

"You accused me of poisoning your spring, Leopold Burvenich. I denied it then, but I now admit that I hired Red-foot to do the deed. He exceeded his orders, for I only wanted to poison the horse-trough, on a chance of catching your Tornado on your way to the race-meeting.

"It was Red-foot who put the rattle-weed in your racer's manger, but it was I who planned the deed, and my money that paid for its execution. Not simply to insure the winning of the race, for I cared far more for hurting your feelings than I did for the stock, though I kad sworn to strip you of every hoof and horn in

"It was my tongue that poisoned the neighborhood against you. I told them, and backed my word with ample proofs, that you were an outlaw and an escaped felon; that your mother was the notorious Lena Burvenich, who eloped from Morris Kirkendall; but why continue? In one word, all that you have suffered since your coming into this section, has been my work!

"It was Red-foot who stampeded your newlyacquired herd, and he did so under orders from me. I was lying in wait at the grove, meaning to swoop down on the ranch after you passed in chase of the herd, and apply the torch to the ranch, corrais, out-buildings and-"

"I thought you swore they were all in ashes?" coolly interposed Laughing Leo, with a low, mocking laugh at this slip of the tongue.

"They might as well be, for all the good they will ever be to you, laughing demon!" savagely snarled Basil Brock, the deadly fire deepening in his eyes. "Enough talking. You know what I have done. You know how I have avenged my father, thus far. Now I'll tell you what the cap-sheaf of my vengeance shall be.

"You claim to be a man of nerve. I doubt it. but to put the matter forever beyond dispute. I have brought witnesses. I am going to begin with your handsome face, and skin you inch by inch until you beg for mercy like a whining cur under the lash! Then-and not until then-I will send my blade home to your heart!

"Gather up your nerve, Laughing Leo, for in just five minutes by the watch I begin my work! Five minutes, for prayer, if you prefer it!"

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE IS LORD OF ALL. ONLY a hideous blotch on the hoof-scarred plain—only a mass of splintered bones, of man-

gled fiesh, of tattered clothing. Only this where he had seen a human being

fall and be swallowed up by that living avalanche. Only this where he crawled, bruised and half-stunned, his brain alone as clear and active as ever. Only this to meet his agonized gaze as Spread Eagle Sam reached the spot where he believed he had seen his Dandy Pard, Laughing Leo, go down forever!

Even as his eyes swam in his head, and he was turning deathly sick at that horrible sight, the eyes of the giant rancher caught a glimmer of something bright close by his trembling hand, and mechanically he picked it up, to utter a sharp, gasping cry as he saw the bare blade of a long knife—but one entirely strange to him not the knife he felt sure Laughing Leo had worn that day!

And then his hands groped amid the remains, and a moment later were lifted in the light of the moon, a lock of long hair quivering between them. Human hair, wet with blood, but too long ever to have come from the head of his Dandy Pard! Hair, but black as jet!

And there the frightened herders found the giant rancher on his knees, with hands and face lifted up toward heaven.

Those wild yells of Spread Eagle Sam, when he fancied he recognized his Dandy Pard in such frightful peril, together with his rapid firing. had brought the half-demoralized cowboys to the spot. Lacking both of their leaders, they were too badly crippled to do much toward checking that furious stampede.

And then they had heard suspicious sounds just before the herd broke away in flight. They knew of the trouble which existed between the B. B. and Triangle Ranches, and expected ugly work to come of it, sooner or later. And as they recalled those suspicious sounds, they instinctively drew together for self-protection.

They were huddled in a clump as Spread Eagle Sam was overthrown, ready to race back to the ranch in case an enemy too strong to cope with successfully should put in an appearance. And thus it was that they came to find the giant rancher as the dust-clouds rose on the night air.

It was not until far along in the day that Spread Eagle Sam came fairly back to his senses after that terrible shock. Came back to hear that Laughing Leo was missing, gone no one could tell him where!

Spread Eagle Sam stared in mute amaze until the information was repeated; then, with a a hoarse, choking roar he sprung to his feet, his injuries forgotten, only that one strange fact remembered—Laughing Leo was missing!

How? Why? Who was at the bottom of it

all? "That hellion, Basil Brock!" the ex-hidehunter grated, flinging himself upon a fresh horse and dashing away at top speed for the B. B. Ranch.

It was fortunate, perhaps, for both himself and Basil Brock that Spread Eagle Sam encountered a strong party of horsemen under lead of Finn McAvoy, comprising a number of the ranchers who had taken alarm from that mad stampede, and at once set out to trace it up and offer their services in case they should be needed. Fortunate that Ingalls charged up to them, pistols in hand, glaring about in search of the one who he knew must be at the bottom of all this deviltry. For when Sam failed to find Basil Brock among their number, he grew cool enough to answer the eager questions showered upon him, bluntly charging Basil Brock with starting the stampede and making way with Laughing Leo.

There were sufficient grounds for this double charge to make the faces of those who listened ed what had occurred, from seeing her dressed sober enough, and when Finn McAvoy proposed a ride of investigation, there was not a tained from Basil Brock. Knowing that she single dissenting voice. And while on the road | must have learned all their plots, they seized to the B. B. Ranch, the Wild Irishman succeeded in getting Spread Eagle Sam to pass his word that he would use no harsh means until Basil Brock had been given every chance to clear himself.

"Av ye was to jerk the loights out av him, foorst off, sure it's moighty litthle the l'ave o' him could tell ye what's come to the lad, d'ye moind, now?" persuasively concluded McAvoy.

They found Basil Brock at home, overlooking the collection of his stock, cold and composed, altogether unlike a man who had either kidnapped or murdered a hated rival. He coldly denied having been off the place since dusk of the preceding evening. He bade them question his men, if they could not take his unsupported word.

This was done, but nothing was learned to clear up the mystery which enveloped the disappearance of Laughing Leo. And though Spread Eagle Sam threatened to clean out the ranch, from master to slave, from head to tail, he was coaxed away by the glib-tongued Irishman, who seemed strongly interested in solving

the enigma.

that of Spread Eagle Sam that the course of the stampede was followed and the worn-out stock gradually collected. Many of these were killed, many were so utterly broken down as to be literally worthless, but the great majority would be as valuable as ever after rest and food.

"An' av ye kin prove it an' the B. B. Ranch, sure it's their loss an' divil the honest mon in all the Territoory but will make it a p'int to see that same loss made good, d'ye moind, now, honey?"

Spread Eagle Sam frowned faintly. What did he care about the cattle, dead or alive? He had thoughts alone for his Dandy Pard.

Where was Laughing Leo? What strange accident could have befallen him? Alive, he would scarcely remain away so long. Deadsurely there would be some signs of that!

Although the entire herd had passed over the man whom Spread Eagle Sam saw go down with his crippled horse, the remains had been identified as those of the vagabond Indian, Redfoot. And so, had Laughing Leo also fallen a victim to that mad stampede, some signs would remain.

All that day Spread Eagle Sam kept on the move, looking, searching, trying to pick up the trail of his pard or the horse he had ridden on that fatal night; but all in vain. He could track the horse to a point near the timber island, but there all trace was lost.

That day put more than one gray hair into the head of the giant rancher, and when the shades of night began to fall over the earth, he looked years older than he had four-and-twenty hours before.

Although no signs had been discovered, he felt that his Dandy Pard was dead.

"I thank you, gents," he said, gravely, as he stood with bared head before the neighboring ranchers, who were on the point of returning to their own homes. "You've acted kindly, an' this holps to close up a mighty wide gap that was growin' atween us, mainly through the underhan' doin's of Basil Brock. God forgive me ef I wrong him, but I b'lieve he could tell whar my pard is this night! An' ef Leo don't come home afo e day, I'm goin' to call on Basil Brock to find out the reason!"

Nearly all of the ranchers rode away, but Finn McAvov remained, and so did Queen Sate, with Cicero Boggs as body-guard.

Then one of the cowboys rushed in and spluttered:

"Boss, thar's a gal out thar who says-" Spread Eagle Sam did not wait for the conclusion, but dashed out of the ranch to find Meta-lupa, breathless, terrified, almost too agi-

tated for speech. "Quick! to horse if ye are men! They are murdering him!"

"My pard?" hoarsely demanded Spread Eagle

Sam, grasping her arm. "Leo Laughlin-yes! I will guide you-only haste! For the love of kind Heaven, hastehaste!"

Even as the words were trembling on her lips, Spread Eagle Sam drowned them with a hoarse cry that sent every man on the place to preparing their horses and weapons. As for himself, he only stopped to twist one end of a trail rope about the jaw of a horse, then leaped

upon its back and urged Meta-lupa away. She was fully as rapid in her actions, and before Finn McAvoy or the rest could fairly divine what was in the wind, the twain were racing swiftly away through the night.

And as they rode, Meta-lupa explained. After receiving back the gray horse with which Laughing Leo plucked victory from the very jaws of defeat, she hastened back home, only to find Red-foot and Old John recovering from the drugs which she had administered. She refused to say aught when so fiercely accused, but father and son only too readily divinin the gay garments which Red-foot had oband put her in close confinement.

She told how she worked to free herself, finally succeeding. How she discovered the captivity of Laughing Leo, and the great peril which threatened him. How Basil Brock was at the bottom of it all, and how she had ridden on the "gray ghost" for aid to rescue the young rancher from death, even though in so doing she would be endangering her own father and brother.

"You will spare them?" she faltered, timidly. "They have sinned, but they are very poor, and the gold of that demon tempted them. Show mercy, even as ye hope for mercy when the Great Spirit calls you home!"

Spread Eagle Sam shivered a little as his memory recalled the awful doom which had overtaken one of those for whom her sweet lips pleaded. But he would not tell her this, just

"Ef we're in time-ef they hain't butchered my pard!" he muttered, hoarselv.

"We will—we must be in time! On—we are

only crawling!" Yet the "Gray Ghost" was racing at its best, It was more the work of Finn McAvoy than 'though too badly worn to leave behind such a

desperate rider as the giant rancher, whose spurs dropped blood at every leap of his horse. And behind them raced Finn McAvov, Queen Sate, Cicero Boggs and all of the cow Loys em-

ployed on the Triangle Ranch.

On without break or pause until the rocky barrier was almost gained. Then Meta-lupa reined in her panting steed, leaping to the ground and motioning to Spread Eagle Sam to do the same. He obeyed without a word.

Despite her terrible dread lest she should even now be too late to rescue the young rancher alive from the hands of his bitter eneny, the Indian girl forced herself to await the coming of the main party, in order to warn them of the strict caution which must be maintained. A very few words sufficed for this, then she led the way through the dark passage and up to therude hut, from whence came loua, stern words: "Time is up, you devil! And this is how I

avenge-" With a low scream of mingled terror and joy. Meta-lupa flung open the door and sprung across

the room. Basil Brock took one fierce glance—then struck viciously at the heart of his bated rival, whipping forth the bloody blade as he fought off the Indian girl with his left hand, striking at her viciously, snarling and cursing more like a

maniac than aught sane or human.

Meta-lupa staggered back, just as Spread Eagle Sam leaped across the room, catching Basil Brock up in his mighty grasp, lifting him over his head and hurling him with awful force against the rear wall of the cabin. With a sickening thud he struck against the logs, then dropped to the floor, lying without life or motion, save a spasmodic shivering of his limbs. And with a hand still gripping the haft of his knife, the blade of which was buried in his heart, driven home by the weight of his own body!

The disguised men and Old John strove to escape, but were met at the door by Finn McAvoy and Cicero Boggs. There was a confused struggle which could have but one ending. The men were quickly overpowered, both wounded. And Old John, moaning feebly, was hastily carried away from the cabin, lest the sight of his hurts prove fatal to Meta-lupa.

After all, it might have been worse. Though Basil Brock struck straight for the heart of his rival, Laughing Leo had partly evaded his thrust, receiving only a painful flesh wound as the knife glanced along his ribs. And Metalupa, though severely wounded, would recover with careful attention.

"Which she'll git-God bless the little angel!" fervently uttered Spread Eagle Sam, when this announcement was made by Finn McAvoy and Queen Sate. "Only fer her, I'd never seen my pard ag'in! Leo, lad, putt it thar! Durn the smoke-cl'ar the track, you!" and the giantrancher plunged blindly out of the room, tears filling his pop-eyes.

Two litters were made, and on these, swung between horses, Meta-lupa and Laughing Leo were carried to the Emerald Ranch.

Queen Sate insisted upon this being done, both because that was nearer than the Triangle Ranch, and because the wounded couple would need the tender care of a woman for nurse.

"You need have no fear, Mr. Laughlin," she murmured in his ear, a soft blush suffusing her face, a strangely softened light in her great eyes. "The wild Irish girl is dead, and her poor follies are buried with her! Forget them-and forgive !"

She did not pause for an answer, but Laughing Leo knew that her words were sincere. At best her fancy for him had been but little more than that, however it might have grown and strengthened under encouragement.

As yet, Meta-lupa knew nothing of Red-foot's death, or how severely old John had been injured in his effort to escape arrest. It was mainly the doings of Spread Eagle Sam that insured this silence. His big heart had been wholly captured by the "little Injun gal" to whose courage and devotion he owed the life of his Dandy Pard.

And Sam took care that Laughing Leo should fully understand all that he owed to Meta-lupa before he left him, fairly installed at the Emerald Ranch. He told how vainly he had sought for a trace of the missing man, and how he was about giving over in despair when Meta-lupa brought word of his peril, begging for aid to rescue him.

"Mebbe she's a bit off-color, lad," he added, earnestly. "But she's clean white at heart! Ef you're sech a durned fool, be-blizzered ef the ole man don't snuggle up to her his own self-so thar!"

Perhaps it was this that rendered Laughing Leo so grave after the departure of his partner. Perhaps it was this that made him ask for Queen Sate, and inquire if he might speak a few words in private with Meta-lupa. And perhaps it was this that made the wild Irish girl smile and nod her head knowingly as she ran down-stairs to meet and greet Cicero Boggs, who was just alighting at the door.

Meta was dressed and reclining in an easychair, when Laughing Leo was left alone with her. She looked even more beautiful than usual.

he thought, as her large eyes sunk beneath his gaze, as the color came and went in her cheeks, distinctly visible though they were brown.

"I have not thanked you yet for all you have done for me, Meta," he said, softly, kneeling beside her chair and taking possession of her hands, holding them between his own, despite the trembling effort she made to release them.

"Please don't-I want no thanks," she murmured, turning her face away, her breath coming quick and unevenly. "It was nothing-"

"Nothing, Meta?" with a touch of reproach in his voice. "Nothing to save my honornothing to save my life?"

"I meant—I didn't mean—"

"All this you did, Meta," his voice growing deeper, more tender. "All this-yet I am not satisfied. I want you to do more-much more! Meta, I want you to love me, even as I love you! I want you to be my bride—my wife! Will you, darling?"

A gasping cry parted her lips, and there was a look almost of horror in her eyes as they turn-

ed to meet his passionate look.

"Oh, no-you must not-you forget!" she panted.

"All save that I love you, Meta. All save that I want you for all my own-my little wife," he earnestly repeated.

With an effort that shook her weakened frame severely, Meta-lupa overcame her agitation. Her voice was comparatively steady as she said:

"Do you know who and what I am? An In-

dian girl—a squaw!"

"I love you, Meta!" was his only reply. "Worse than that—listen!" and she shivered anew as she forced herself to add the words, how bitter to her pride, not even the man who knelt at her side, clasping her trembling hands so lovingly, could know.

"It was my father who prepared the little sack of herbs you found with the other poison in the spring! It was the hand of my brother

who buried the poison there!" "And it was their daughter, their sister, who came to warn me of danger—who saved my life.

This wipes out the other, Meta!"

"It was my poor, misguided brother who put that awful weed in the manger from which your horse ate it!"

"And it was his sister who risked her life to make amends! His sister who brought me another horse, by which I defeated my enemy! His sister, who dared do this-what not another woman in all the territory would have dared attempt!"

Meta-lupa caught her breath, her head leaning back against the cushions. It was so hard to speak thus! So hard to hold out against this handsome, loving man! For-she knew it now, if she had succeeded in deceiving herself up to this period—she loved him passionately!

Yet she would not yield—she could not yield

with aught untold.

"He-my brother-run off your cattle. He was to help burn your property. Help capture and torture you. My brother, remember!" "I love you, Meta," was his sole response in

words.

"It must not be! You are mad! Think

what your people will say!"

"Spread Eagle Sam is the only one I have to consider, little pet, and he vows that if I don't win and wed you, he'll do it himself!" Leo laughed, rising until he could turn her face fairly toward his, adding gravely, earnestly: "If you hate me, Meta, close your eyes, and] will go away, never to trouble you again. If not-Meta!" he cried, his voice trembling with great joy. "Meta, you do love me, then?"

"Have I not proved it, Leo?" she faintly murmured.

And then-

CHAPTER XX.

WHEREIN CICERO "GETS THERE!" "NEVER a word will I speak that can light up your understanding, Leo Laughlin!" and Queen Sate nodded her head so vigorously that her hat almost flew off. "And it's with a white feather I'll be presenting ye, as a token that you're afraid to trust to the word of a woman! Sure it's not the little boy beside ye that stopped to think twice before he spoke once—and that once a good round yes!"

Spread Eagle Sam grinned broadly as Queen Sate changed her portentous frown into an approving smile, as her great eyes turned from Laughing Leo to himself, the "little boy" in

question.

There was something peculiar in the wind,

from all appearances.

It was the second day after the rescue at Old John's hut, and Laughing Leo had been over to the Triangle Ranch, receiving cattle from the B. B. Ranch. Queen Sate came riding posthaste after them, saying that important business awaited their arrival at Emerald Ranch. But what that business was, she flatly declined to tell them. She even went further than this: stepping clear over the bounds of reason, Leo thought.

Leo and Ingalls were asked to pledge their

words to see and listen in perfect silence until permission was given them to speak. They were on no account to address a single person whom they might see.

Spread Eagle Sam quickly agreed. There was a peculiar twinkle in his pop-eyes that aroused the suspicions of his pard that the giant rancher was at least partially in the se-

"Do it, pard!" muttered Sam, with a nudge of his elbow as they rode along side by side. "Never say no to a woman. They cain't do no more then make a barbycue out of us, anywayan' what's that 'mount to?"

Laughing Leo submitted, only to have a fresh condition imposed on him by the laughing, mischievous Queen Sate. As they alighted before the Emerald Ranch, she barred his way with a folded silken scarf, declaring that he must submit to being blindfolded.

As he had yielded once, so he yielded now. And with the light entirely shut out from his eyes, he was guided by Queen Sate into the house, And he heard Spread Eagle Sam mutter barely | ing cry! above his breath in startled tones:

"Good Lawd! Who'd 'a' thunk it!"

"Quiet-silence-remember your pledge, for her sake!" Queen Sate breathed softly into Leo's ear, as her little hands clung tighter to his arm, guiding him to a chair and forcing him into it.

Like one in a dream, almost, Laughing Leo submitted. And then, without warning, there rose the clear, distinct voice of Cicero Boggs:

"Friends all! I have a little story to relate to you, which I am vain enough to think will interest you deeply.

"Years ago, there lived in Chicago a man by the name of Briscoe Davidson. Never mind his station in life, his business, his relatives, his personal peculiarities: we have only to do with the manner of his starting out in a new life.

"Briscoe Davidson committed murder and robbery, under peculiarly atrocious circumstances, and though it was months before the crime was fairly traced to his door, the chain of evidence was at last complete. All that was lacking was the criminal; he had fled, and though the entire force was on the lookout for him, he was not found.

"About a month ago, a hint—scarcely strong enough to be called a clew-caused my chief to send me up in these parts to look after the longabandoned murder case. There was a whisper Davidson in this section, though the chief could give me no positive information. I was to study up the old case, and do the best I could.

"As a blind, giving me something to ask people questions about while covertly pursuing my real case, the chief picked up some papers relating to a long-missing heir to a vast fortune in the Old Country. I was to pretend to be looking for Melchoir Parkindale, or his heirs, while in reality hunting down this ghost of a clew to Briscoe Davidson.

"And now, see how curiously the affair turns out: In looking for another, I found Briscoe Davidson. In finding Briscoe Davidson, I found out all about Melchoir Parkindale. And in discovering the assassin of Melchoir Parkindale, I came across the heirs to the fortune in far-away England."

"Remember your oath!" whispered Queen Sate in the ear of Laughing Leo as he gave a start. "Patience—patience and hope!"

"It was only on his death-bed that I discovered Briscoe Davidson," resumed Cicero Boggs, after a brief pause. "It was only when he realized that his death was inevitable that I could frighten or coax him into making a full confession of the murder for which he was wanted in Chicago. He did confess, and I have that confession, written out in full and signed before witnesses. But let that pass.

"Imagine my surprise when Briscoe Davidson began to speak of Melchoir Parkindale! Began to mutter and rave of another atrocious crime, which had troubled him a thousand times more than all his other crimes put together.

"The story is too long to give in detail, just now, and a condensed report will serve our ends

just as well. "Briscoe Davidson and his son Austin made the acquaintance of Melchoir Parkindale many a long mile from here, when they were on the brink of starvation. Parkindale treated them as though they were his blood relations, and for nearly a year they lived at his expense. Thenwhile drinking, and crazed with liquor, a quarrel arose which resulted in the death of Parkindale. And to cover this crime, father and son robbed the house, set it on fire, and with the most precious possession of the murdered man, fled through the night.

"If suspected, they never knew it. If followed, they were never overtaken. And so they came here, haunted by the still older crime, hearing that the bloodhounds of the law were still searching for the man who killed Anthony Deacon in

Chicago. "Came here, not as they left the blazing home of their last victim. Came here to be known as Old John and Red-foot, his son."

A shiver ran over the frame of the blinded

rancher, though he had long since foreseen what the end of this story must be. A shiver of pain for what poor Meta-lupa must be suffering; of honest indignation toward the man who could thus coolly lay bare her wounds.

"Patience—and hope!" Queen Sate breathed in his ear. "She is here, and watching you. She is smiling, and not in tears. Patience!"

"As he lay gasping out his life, Briscoe Davidson told me that he had suffered terrible remorse over killing Melchoir Parkindale, which he solemnly declared was the result of an accident, and not through ill-will or by intention. He said that only the fear of death led him to cover his crime by fire, but that not even this dread could induce him to make all sure by adding another death to the score; and though he might be carrying his own condemnation with him, he could not help carrying away Melchoir Parkindale's little daughter, Meta-"

Queen Sate was still banging to the arm of Laughing Leo, but at this juucture be sprung to his feet, casting her aside, tearing the bandage into a room where he felt there were others. from his eyes, to stagger back with a low, chok-

Was it? Could it be?

Still weak from her wound, Meta-lupa occupied the same easy-chair in which he saw her when Laughing Leo so simply answered her objections to his suit. Meta-lupa—but no longer with the brown face and hands of an Indian girl-Meta-lupa, white and fairskinned, looking doubly beautiful in civilized garb. Meta-lupa smiling, joyous-eyed, seeing only the man she loved with all her heart—the man who had wooed and won her while thinking her what she seemed, one of a despised race, the daughter and sister of criminals!

Spread Eagle Sam caught his pard by the arm and gave him a half-savage shake as he saw the maiden sink back on her pillow, turning pale as death, frightened by the way in which her lover shrunk back.

"Take her, you dumb critter! Take her while you kin-fer I'm gittin' most monstrous hungry my own self! Take her, or I will."

The spell was broken. With a low, passionate cry, that was almost a sob, Leo Laughlin sprung forward and dropped on his knees beside the couch of the wounded girl-the girl who had risked her life to preserve his—the girl who had won his love while seeming an Indian squaw.

And Spread Eagle Sam drove all but those two out of the room, slamming the door behind him. And then his shrill eagle-cry rose and of some one seeing and recognizing Briscoe grew until it fairly made the house-roof quiver!

> Strange as this story was, it was nevertheless proven true after careful investigation. With the death of Briscoe Davidson, "Cicero Boggs," as he persisted in calling himself, devoted a month to verifying the confession made by Old John, and finally came back with ample proofs that Meta-lupa was indeed the heiress to the Parkindale fortune.

> Meantime, a consultation of ranchers was held over the Brock affair, the two men captured at the time their master met his death by his own knife, confessing all. And after due deliberation, the council decided that the B. B. Ranch must pay the Triangle Ranch the full number of head won by "the gray ghost" over Red Rover, destroying the receipt given for the herd which Red-foot afterward stampeded. When this was done, Finn McAvoy assumed charge of the ranch until the relatives of Basil Brock could be communicated with. In the end the property was sold, and the name of the ranch changed—to what? The "C. B. Ranch!"

> For "Cicero Boggs" finally "got there!" And Queen Sate settled down into the very model of a wife and mother. No longer the wild Irish girl. No longer the ally of the cattlethieves.

To this day she never tires of thanking Wirt

Dalton for saving her from the downward trail. Laughing Leo wedded Meta Parkindale, and though it was a hard wrench for Spread Eagle Sam to part with his "Dandy Pard," he was partially consoled by their promise to spend a goodly portion of each year at the ranch, now

wholly owned by the ex-bide-hunter. "Tell ye what, pard!" he whispered confidentially as they parted for the first time after the wedding. "They ain't many he-critters as kin lay over my ole pard, Laughing Leo, but-you mark my word, an' mark it down good an' deep! Ef we all o' us live long enough, I'll make a better man of your fu'st boy then even his pap ever

"That may well be, old friend," huskily uttered Laughlin, gripping that honest hand tightly. moisture filling his eyes. "If I could only blot out the past!"

was-so thar!"

"Blot out nothin'!" indignantly cried Spread Eagle Sam. "Want to spoil all the fun I'll hey to think over when you're gone. A better man, I said, not a gooder man! An' I'm boun' to do it! Look at the stock on both sides, will you? You—the best man o' the same inches I ever met! She-brave as a tigress, yet sweet as honey b'iled down, an' true as steel, pure as refined gold!

"I kin do it, pard! An' I will, too!"

THE END.

BEADLE'S DIME LIBRARY.

BY WILLIAM R. EYSTER.

- 145 Pistol Pards; or, The Silent Sport from Cinnabar.
- 160 Soft Hand, Sharp; or, The Man with the Sand.
- 182 Hands Up; or, The Knights of the Canyon.
- 192 The Lightning Sport.
- 211 The Two Cool Sports; or, Gertie of the Gulch.
- 229 Captain Cutsleeve; or, The Little Sport.
- 268 Magic Mike, the Man of Frills.
- 300 A Sportain Spectacles; or, The Bad Time at Bunco.
- 333 Derringer Dick, the Man with the Drop.
- 344 Double Shot Dave of the Left Hand.
- 356 Thr e Handsome Sports; or, The Double Combination.
- 375 Royal George, the Three in One.
- 396 The Piper Detective.
- 402 Snapshot Sam; or, The Angels' Flat Racket.
- 429 Hair Trigger Tom of Red Bend.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

- 8 The Headless Horseman; A Strange Story of Texas.
- 12 The Death-Shot; or, Tracked to Death.
- 55 The Scalp Hunters. A Romance of the Plains.
- 66 The Specter Barque. A Tale of the Pacific.
- 74 The Captain of the Rifles; or, The Queen of the Lakes.
- 200 The Rifle Rangers; or, Adventures in Mexico.
- 208 The White Chief. A Romance of Northern Mexico.
- 213 The War Trail; or, The Hunt of the Wild Horse.
- 218 The Wild Huntress; or, The Squatter's Vengeance.
- 228 The Maroon. A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah.
- 234 The Hunter's Feast.
- 267 The White Squaw.

BY CAPTAIN FREDERICK WHITTAKER.

- 39 The Russian Spy; or, The Starry Cross Brothers.
- 65 The Red Rajah; or, The Scourge of the Indies.
- 69 The Irish Captain. A Tale of Fontency.
- 96 Double Death; or, The Spy of Wyoming.
- 98 The Rock Rider; or, The Spirit of the Sierra.
- 108 The Duke of Diamonds.

 115 The Severed Head; or,
- 115 The Severed Head; or, The Secret of Castle Coucy.
- 132 Nemo, King of the Tramps.
- 159 Red Rudiger, the Archer.
- 174 The Phantom Knights.
- 187 The Death's Head Cuirassiers.
- 193 The Man in Red.
- 206 One Eye, the Cannoneer.
- 211 Colonel Plunger; or, The Unknown Sport.
- 215 Parson Jim, King of the Cowboys.
- 226 The Mad Hussars; or, The O's and the Mac's.
- 230 The Flying Dutchman of 1880.
- 242 The Fog Devil; or, The Skipper of the Flash.
 247 Alligator Ike; or, The Secret of the Everglade.
- 253 A Yankee Cossack; or, The Queen of the Nihilists.
- 265 Old Double-Sword; or, Pilots and Pirates.
- 272 Seth Slocum, Railroad Surveyor.
- 277 The Saucy Jane, Privateer.
- 284 The Three Frigates; or, Old Ironsides' Revenge.
- 290 The Lost Corvette; or, Blakeley's Last Cruise.
- 295 Old Cross-Eye, the Maverick-Hunter.
- 303 Top-Notch Tom, the Cowboy Outlaw.
- 810 The Marshal of Satanstown; or, The Cattle-
- Lifters' League.
 326 The Whitest Man in the Mines.
- 378 John Armstrong, Mechanic.
- 406 Old Pop Hicks, Showman.
- 412 Larry Locke, the Man of Iron.

BY C. DUNNING CLARK.

164 The King's Fool. 183 Gilbert the Guide.

BY NEWTON M. CURTISS.

120 The Texan Spy; or. The Prairie Guide. 254 Giant Jake, the Patrol of the Mountain.

BY JACKSON KNOX—"Old Hawk."

386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective. 424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

398 Sleepless Eye, the Pacific Detective. 432 The Giant Horseman.

BY PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

57 The Silent Hunter. 86 The Big Hunter; or, The Queen of the Woods.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON.

- 176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.
- 194 Don Sombrero, the California Road Gent.
- 202 Cactus Jack, the Giant Guide.
- 219 The Scorpion Brothers; or, Mad Tom's Mission.
- 223 Canyon Dave, the Man of the Mountain.
- 227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
- 237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
- 245 Barranca Bill, the Revolver Champion.
- 258 Bullet Head, the Colorado Bravo. 263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer.
- 266 Leopard Luke, the King of Horse-Thieves.
- 271 Stonefist, of Big Nugget Bend.
- 276 Texa: Chick, the Southwest Detective.
- 285 Lightning Bolt, the Canyon Terror.
- 291 Horseshoe Hank, the Man of Big Luck.
- 305 Silver-Plated Sol, the Montana Rover.
- 311 Heavy Hand; or, The Marked Men.
 323 Hotspur Hugh; or, The Banded Brothers.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, The California Blood-
- 297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
- 385 Wil! Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
- 405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
- 415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
- 427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.

BY SAM S. HALL-"Buckskin Sam."

- 3 Kit Carson, Jr., the Crack Shot.
- 90 Wild Will, the Mad Ranchero.
- 178 Dark Dashwood, the Desperate.
- 186 The Black Bravo; or, The Tonkaway's Triumph.
 191 The Terrible Tonkaway; or, Old Rocky and his
- Pards.

 195 The Lone Star Gambler; or, The Magnolias Maid.
- 199 Diamond Dick, the Dandy from Denver.
- 204 Big Foot Wallace, the King of the Lariat.
- 212 The Brazos Tigers; or, The Minute Men.
- 217 The Serpent of El Paso; or, Frontier Frank.
- 221 Desperate Duke, the Guadaloupe "Galoot.'
 225 Rocky Mountain Al; or, The Waif of the Range.
- 239 The Terrible Trio; or, The Angel of the Army.
- 244 Merciless Mart, the Man Tiger of Missouri.
- 250 The Rough Riders: or, Sharp Eye the Scourge.
- 256 Double Dan the Dastard; or, The Pirates.
- 264 The Crooked Three.
- 269 The Bayou Bravo; or, The Terrible Trail.
- 273 Mountain Mose, the Gorge Outlaw.
- 282 The Merciless Marauders; or, Carl's Revenge.
- 287 Dandy Dave and his Horse, White Stocking.
- 293 Stampede Steve; or, The Doom of the Double Face.
- 301 Bowlder Bill; or, The Man from Taos.
- 309 Raybold, the Rattling Ranger.
- 322 The Crimson Coyotes; or Nita the Nemesis. 328 King Kent; or, The Bandits of the Bason.
- 342 Blanco Bill, the Mustang Monarch.
- 358 The Prince of Pan Out.
- 371 Gold Buttons; or, The Up Range Pards.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON.

- 13 Pathaway; or, Nick Whiffles, the old Nor'west Trapper.
- 17 Nightshade; or, The Robber Prince.
- 22 Whitelaw; or, Nattie of the Lake Shore.
- 37 Hirl, the Hunchback; or, The Santee Sword-maker.
- 58 Silver Knife; or, The Rocky Mountain Ranger
- 70 Hydrabad, the Strangler.
- 70 Hydrabad, the Strangler.
 73 The Knights of the Red Cross; or, The Granada Magician.
- 163 Ben Brion; or, Redpath, the Avenger.

BY FRANCIS JOHNSON.

- 25 The Gold Guide; or, Steel Arm, Regulator.
- 26 The Death Track; or, The Mountain Outlaws.
- 123 Alapaha the Squaw; or, The Border Renegades:
 124 Assowaum the Avenger; or, The Doom of the
 Destroyer.
- 135 The Bush Ranger; or, The Half-Breed Rajah.
- 136 The Outlaw Hunter; or, The Bush Ranger.
- 138 The Border Bandit; or, The Horse Thief's Trail.

BY GEORGE ST. GEORGE.

- 296 Dnncan, the Sea Diver.
- 417 Tucson Tom; or, The Fire Trailers.

BY COLONEL THOMAS HOYER MONSTERY.

- 82 Iron Wrist, the Swordmaster.
- 126 The Demon Duelist; or, The League of Steel.
- 143 The Czar's Spy; or, The Nibilist League.
- 150 El Rubio Bravo, King of the Swordsmen.
- 157 Mourad, the Mameluke; or, The Three Swordmasters.
- 169 Corporal Cannon, the Man of Forty Duels.
- 236 Champion Sam; or, The Monarchs of the Show.
- 262 Fighting Tom, the Terror of the Toughs.
- 332 Spring-Heel Jack; or, The Masked Mystery.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

- 390 The Giant Cupid; or Cibuta John's Jubilee.
- 422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.
- BY ISAAC HAWKS, Ex-Detective.
- 232 Orson Oxx; or, The River Mystery. 240 A Cool Head; or, Orson Oxx in Peril.

BY PROF. J. H. INGRAHAM.

- 113 The Sea Slipper; or, The Freebooters.
- 118 The Burglar Captain; or The Fallen Star.
- 314 Lafitte; or, The Pirate of the Gulf.

316 Lafitte's Lieutenant; or, Child of the Sea.

BY GUSTAVE AIMARD.

- 15 The Tiger Slayer; or, Eagle Heart to the Rescue.
- 15 The Tiger Slayer; or, Eagle Hea 19 Red Cedar, the Prairie Outlaw.
- 20 The Bandit at Bay; or, The Prairie Pirates.
- 21 The Trapper's Daughter; or, The Outlaw's Fate.
 24 Prairie Flower.
- 62 Loyal Heart; or The Trappers of Arkansas.
 149 The Border Rifles. A Tale of the Texan War.
- 151 The Freebooters. A Story of the Texan War.
 153 The White Scalper.

MISCELLANEOUS.

- 6 Wildcat Bob, the Boss Bruiser. By Edward L. Wheeler.
- 9 Handy Andy. By Samuel Lover.
- 10 Vidocq, the French Police Spy. Written by himself.
- 11 Midshipman Easy. By Captain Maryatt.
 32 B'hoys of Yale; or, The Scrapes of Collegians.
 66 Wide Awake, the Robber King. By Frank Du-
- mont.
 68 The Fighting Trapper. By Captain J. F. C.
- Adams.
- 76 The Queen's Musketeers. By George Albany.
 78 The Mysterious Spy. By Arthur M. Grainger.
- 102 The Masked Band; or, The Man without a Name. By George L. Aiken.

110 The Silent Rifleman. By H. W. Herbert.

- 125 The Blacksmith Outlaw; or, Merrie England. By Harrison Ainsworth.
- 133 Rody the Rover. By William Carleton. 140 The Three Spaniards. By Geo. Walker.
- 144 The Hunchback of Notre Dame. By Victor Hugo.
- 146 The Doctor Detective. By George Lemuel. 152 Captain Ironnerve, the Counterfeiter Chief.

Urban.

J. Cobb.

Morse.

- 158 The Doomed Dozen. By Dr. Frank Powell. 166 Owlet, the Robber Prince. By Septimus R.
- 179 Conrad, the Convict. By Prof. Gildersleeve.
 190 The Three Guardsmen. By Alexander Dumas.
- 261 Black Sam, the Prairie Thunderbolt. By Col. Jo Yards.

 275 The Smuggler Cutter; or, The Cavern in the
- Cliff. By J. D. Conroy.

 312 Kinkfoot Karl, the Mountain Scourge. By Morris Redwing.
- 330 Cop Colt, the Quaker City Detective. By Charles Morris.

 350 Flash Falcon, the Society Detective. By Weldon
- 353 Bart Brennan; or, The King of Straight Flush.
 By John Cuthbert.
 366 The Telegraph Detective. By George Henry
- 410 Sarah Brown, Detective. By K. F. Hill. 428 The Flying Glim; or, The Island Lure. By Leon
- Beadle's Dime Library is for sale by all Newsdealers, ten cents per copy, or sent by mail on receipt of twelve cents each. BEADLE & ADAMS, Publishers, 98 William Street, New York.

A new issue every Wednesday.